

**“No-one knows what happens.”**

**Enriching our understanding of the resilience of young people in a Pupil  
Referral Unit.**

**D.H. Hunter**

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Department of Psychology

University of Essex

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**Abstract**

This study presents an in-depth, idiographic, phenomenological exploration of the experiences, views and perceptions of four young people in a Pupil Referral Unit, in relation to ecological factors of resilience.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the resultant transcripts subjected to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. This analysis points to the powerful debilitating impact local ecological factors associated with resilience can have on the participants' sense of self and ability to feel safe, along with their subsequent projection of aggression and hostility towards others in their community. Some of the participants describe how the ensuing feelings of negative self-image coupled with heightened vigilance, result in their directing negative affect towards others. The results section gives a detailed account of these processes at work, analytically describing four superordinate themes: 'Transition of the Self', 'Feeling Unsafe', 'Surviving in a Dangerous World', and 'External Influences'. Each theme is presented with subordinate themes and extracts taken from each participant, and with the interpretations made by the researcher. The analysis is discussed with reference to existent literature, including work on attachment, containment and gangs.

This study views resilience as a multilevel dynamic concept, needing to be understood at an idiographic level. The relevance to Educational Psychologists work is highlighted, and future areas for research suggested.

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## Glossary Of Terms

SEMHD Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties.

PRU Pupil Referral Unit

EPS Educational Psychology Service

PRU Pupil Referral Unit

NEET Not in Education, Education, Employment or Training

EBSD Emotional Behavioural and Social Difficulties

BESD Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties

SEBD Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

EBD Emotional Behavioural Difficulties

CYRM Child & Youth Resilience Measure

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

### 1.1 Research Problem

*'The better documented youth's own constructions of resilience, the more likely it will be that those intervening identify specific aspects of resilience most relevant to health outcomes as defined by a particular population.'*  
(Ungar 2008, p234)

This study views resilience as a multilevel dynamic concept, with multiple intervening variables for each individual. The impact of these variables in determining an individual's pathways to resilience and which locally available resources they access in striving to stay emotionally and physically well, will depend on the young person's experiences and perceptions; thereby, it is argued, an understanding of the factors of resilience that a young person accesses is most accessible through an interpretivist constructivist approach. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore four young people's experiences, views and perceptions of ecological factors of resilience. The young people all attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), and are described as having Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Difficulties (SEMHD).

Firstly, in order to explain the importance of the study focusing on the resilience of young people with SEMHD, the wider international and national contexts are presented, before describing the more local context. Then an overview of how the concept of resilience has developed is presented, including a clear summary of the model of resilience that this study ascribes to.

Finally, the research aims and rationale are presented, along with some personal reflections.

## **1.2 International context**

Improving outcomes and resilience of children and young people, in particular those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties (SEMHD), is of international concern. There is an international increase in pupils with SEMHD, with disruptive pupil behaviour in the classroom perceived by head teachers to be the most frequently occurring problem for most countries (DfE, 2012). Emotional and behavioural disorders are thought to affect 10-15 percent of children globally (NIMH, 2014).

## **1.3 National context**

More specifically to the UK, the UNICEF report, 'An overview of child well-being in rich countries' (UNICEF, 2013) places the UK at the bottom of 21 advanced countries for family and peer relationships, behaviour and educational and subjective well-being. Exclusions from school are increasing, and identifying young people at risk and how to re-engage them in education has become a priority for the UK government (Ewen and Topping, 2012). The term 'Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties' was recently introduced as a Special Educational Need in the SEN Code of Practice 2014 (DfE & DoH, 2014) in recognition of the impact of these difficulties on academic attainment. These pupils were previously referred to as having 'Emotional, Behavioural and Social Difficulties' (EBSD), or other similar terms such as 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' (EBD) or Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). In recent years there has been a rise in pupils on school SEN registers for BESD from 1.7% of all pupils in



2004, to 2.1% in 2011; 26% of pupils who were on School Action Plus and 14% of pupils with statements had BESD as their primary need (DfE 2012a).

Young people in PRUs are often permanently excluded from schools (Cooper 2001; Jull 2008; Visser, Daniels, and MacNab 2005), with estimates of pupils with BESD who were at School Action Plus about 20 times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than those with no special educational needs (DfE: 2010a). Children who have been permanently excluded have poor life outcomes: they are less likely to achieve 5 good GCSE results or to be in employment in later life (DfE 2010b). There is a link between being excluded from school and becoming involved in crime: 86% of young men in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) have been excluded from school at some point (Ministry of Justice, 2014a); 42% of those in prison had been permanently excluded and 88% had short-term exclusions (Ministry of Justice, 2014a). 18% of sentenced young people in custody had a statement of special educational need, compared to 3% of the population, and over half of 15–17 year olds in YOIs have the literacy and numeracy level expected of a 7–11 year old (Ministry of Justice, 2014b).

Pupils with SEMHD frequently have many risk factors, including coming from disadvantaged families or neighbourhoods, or being Looked After Children (DfE, 2012a). Challenging behaviour varies but includes hyperactivity, anti-social behaviour, and difficulties with self-regulation of behavioural responses. Studies suggest between 6-8% of children seven years old or younger in the UK have serious behaviour problems, and a further 6% are 'borderline' as measured by the SDQ (Goodman, 2001; Hansen et al, 2010; Bradshaw and Tipping, 2010; Department for Education, 2012b).

Young people with SEMHD have an increased risk of needing to access mental health services, with anti-social behaviour accounting for 30-40% of referrals to local Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services in the LA in which this research took place. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2007) highlights that adversity, such as being a victim of, or witnessing, violence and living in a climate of fear and uncertainty, can cause long-term mental health issues and difficulty with socialising. Poverty is also recognised in the aetiology of mental illness, with the lowest fifth of household incomes twice as likely to develop mental health problems as those living in the highest incomes (Campion, Bhugra, Bailey, and Marmot, 2013).

Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and the earlier it starts the more persistent the illness (NIMH, 2014). According to Young Minds (2014) 1 in 10 children and young people aged five to sixteen years in the UK suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder; of those 9.6% or nearly 850,000 children and young people aged between five to sixteen years have a mental disorder; 5.8% or just over 510,000 children and young people have a conduct disorder and 1.5% or just over 132,000 children and young people have severe ADHD.

There is a clear link between resilience and mental health. Recent reports for Government have considered resilience as being considered central to any public mental health developments, with an essential focus on developing resilient communities (Young Foundation, 2012).

## 1.4 Local context

The Local Authority (LA) in which this study takes place has 145 students with a statement for Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), now referred to as SEMHD, which is 17.2% of the total number of statements. Of these, more than a third are in specialist provision (April 2015).

Within the LA the biggest group of Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) 16-18 year olds have a diagnosis of BESD (Local Authority Residency Newsletter, January 2015). The significantly largest group within this figure are school leavers from the PRU.

Locally, young people with SEMHD have been identified as a targeted population to be closely monitored by the LA, as they have the greatest number of agencies and professionals involved with them, and are at risk of documented poor outcomes.

The LA in which this research takes place has the highest percentage of permanently excluded (PEX) pupils 2012-13 in the region. There was a significant increase in the LA total PEX from twenty (0.09% of total school population) in 2011-12 to forty (0.2% of total school population) in 2012-13. The most common reason for the PEX was 'persistent disruptive behaviour', suggesting that schools may possibly use exclusion for the benefit of the majority of their pupils, rather than to meet the needs of the pupil with BESD.

The PRU provides services for excluded pupils or those whose emotional, behavioural or medical needs prevent them from attending school. The majority are of secondary school age. It only offers part-time provision due to the demand for places as a result of the high number of permanently excluded pupils in the authority. When not in the PRU the young people are

offered a range of alternative educational placements and opportunities to give them a broad range of experiences. The majority of the pupils in the PRU attend for a year before returning to mainstream or moving to special schools.

The Ofsted Inspection 2012 rated the PRU 'Good' in all areas, with Leadership and Management rated as 'Outstanding'. It was highlighted that the students make good progress in learning, behaviour and personal development. The PRU leadership are influential in the LA at strategic level and provide advice to other schools. They agreed to this research for a number of reasons: to further explore the concept of resilience, to gain a rich picture of the life experiences and perceptions of a small group of their pupils, and as an example of exploring and listening to their pupil's views and experiences. The PRU staff are interested in future studies into how their students can use ecological factors of resilience to achieve better life outcomes, improve reintegration into mainstream school, and to develop confidence and the ability to work more independently.

### **1.5 Information on Pupil Referral Units**

Pupil Referral Units are the most common type of Alternative Provisions used in the UK (DCSF 2008; Ofsted 2011). There are about 450 PRUs educating nearly 25,000 children not all of them excluded (Cullen 2010). The main purpose of PRUs, as well as providing an alternative educational placement for pupils out of school, is to offer therapeutic, educational and behavioural strategies to the young people so they can manage a return to mainstream schooling. Alternative Provision, such as PRUs, is regarded as potentially better placed than mainstream schools to provide education that is sufficiently

flexible to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable young people with BESD (de Jong and Griffiths 2006).

However, outcomes of young people in PRUs are not good (Parsons et al, 2001). The Ofsted Survey of Alternative Provision (2011) highlighted serious concerns about the outcomes of young people leaving PRUs and Alternative Provision, including:

- Two-thirds of permanently excluded pupils and 75 per cent of pupils in Pupil Referral Units have special educational needs (DCFS 2008).
- Up to 94% have poor language and social skills (Mackie and Law, 2010; Ofsted, 2005).
- Poor academic attainment: in 2006 only 1 per cent of 15 year olds in Pupil Referral Units achieved 5 GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent.

## **1.6 What this context tells us**

The international, national and local context around children and young people with SEMHD in a PRU suggests this is a population vulnerable to poor life outcomes.

## **1.7 The link to resilience**

Resilience is a psychological construct that provides a conceptual basis for interventions in schools, communities, and families, to improve the outcomes of young people (Bailey, 2012). It can be seen as a dynamic process of adaptation to adversity (Luthar, 2003), and is necessary for developmental outcomes over the life span (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Ungar, 2012; Masten & Narayan, 2012). A constructivist model of resilience holds that resilience develops over time in the context of multiple person-environment interactions (Egeland, Carlson & Sroufe, 1993; Ungar, 2008), and will be

understood as meaning something different to each person, depending on their interpretations and experiences. Defining resilience in this broad way highlights the multivariate factors that the young people may describe as being influential as risk or protective factors in their lives (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011; Ungar, 2013). How children interpret the world impacts on their development and wellbeing (Boyden and Cooper, 2007), and what they perceive as risk and protective factors will be shaped by their perspectives, experiences and views within the context of their culture and the context in which they live (Ungar, 2005, 2008; Boyden and Mann, 2005). Resilience is recognised as being central in the development of local and national policies to improve outcomes for young people.

This next section will outline the development of the construct of resilience, leading to a multilevel constructivist perspective.

### **1.8 An overview of the development of the concept of resilience.**

Early literature on the developmental effects of chronic adversity and the aetiology of psychopathology (Garmezy, 1993; Rutter, 1979) began to use the term 'resilience' to explain the large number of children who, despite highly aversive circumstances, achieved positive outcomes (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1979; Werner, 2005). These early findings found resilience could moderate the relationship between childhood adversity and later onset psychiatric symptoms. The initial focus on identifying 'risk' factors that impact on children's development led to identifying 'protective' factors which help children adapt and adjust to the adverse effects of stress. The understanding of resilience was moved forward by studies which showed that, despite

multiple adversities and low resilience in adolescence, many individuals achieved competent functioning as adults (DiRago & Vaillant, 2007). Research subsequently began to look at resilience as a fluid and changeable construct across the developmental life course, rather being a fixed internal construct (Campbell-Sills, Cohan & Stein, 2006).

Since this time, there are 4 distinct areas of developments in research into resilience: neurobiological, ecological, multisystem, and a constructivist understanding. These are outlined below.

### **1.81 Neurobiological Developments**

Still at an early stage, recent advances in genomics and neuroscience are now allowing the examination of resilience at multiple levels within physiological and biological systems. It is recognised that toxic-stress at key developmental stages alters neurological, physiological and behavioural systems (Karatsoreos and McEwen, 2013), and research is now focused on what degree neurobiological and physiological plasticity allows reversal of early damage.

This has been a fast developing area, with the major studies into biological and physiological changes, plasticity, and influence of the genes summarised below.

#### ***(i) Biological and physiological changes***

Karatsoreos & McEwen (2013) summarise literature showing physiological changes in the brain following stressors in the environment. The main findings include:

- Neural loss in the corpus collosum, prefrontal cortex (PFC) and hippocampus. The PFC controls executive functioning including self-

regulation, inhibitory control, attention and information processing, and cognitive flexibility.

- After extreme or chronic exposure to stressors, there is both atrophy of cells and increased dendritic spines, indicating greatly increased activity of the amygdala, which regulates emotion, aggression and affect based learning such as fear conditioning, and responses to emotionally charged stimuli in the environment. These changes alter responses to perceived threats (Vaughn et al, 2008), with attention and memory focused on detecting threats at the expenses of processing other stimuli.
- Increases in stress hormones, which affect responses to stimuli.

In addition, EEG studies demonstrate asymmetry in left and right hemispheres between high and low resilient children, with the left hemisphere (associated with positive emotions and behaviour) showing reduced maturation, and the right hemisphere, often associated with negative emotions and behaviours, showing greater maturation (Curtis and Cicchetti, 2007, in Cicchetti, 2013).

A physiological link between chronic or extreme stress and a later increased risk for psychopathology was demonstrated by Alink et al (2009), who found children who had suffered 'maltreatment' such as abusive and inconsistent parenting, had increased hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis arousal, and associated difficulties in managing stress, with consequential developmental and behavioural difficulties. The same authors also found that a secure relationship with their mother improved the child's ability to regulate their emotions.



## ***(ii) Plasticity and adaptability***

Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties may present as a result of the child trying to cope in stressful, chaotic or dangerous homes; a young person who has adapted to survive in such an environment may have difficulty in managing a safe calm one. When interconnected biological systems become chronically deregulated for long time periods, authors have suggested that physiological and psychological consequences that are not conducive to positive outcomes are inevitable and are likely to persist over the life course (Juster, McEwen, & Lupien, 2010; Karatsoreos & McEwen, 2013; Lupien et al., 2007), resulting in life-long difficulties in the regulation of physiological stress systems (Cicchetti, Rogosch, Gunnar, & Toth, 2010). However, studies are beginning to suggest that further neurological changes, or 'plasticity', can take place in the PFC and amygdala (AMY), giving hope for pathways to bolster resilience (Karatsoreos & McEwen, 2013), improve emotional and behaviour regulation, and achieve better outcomes. It is recognised that in response to short-term stressors the brain adapts, through making the changes described above, and when the demands have decreased, can return to baseline. However, there are thought to be periods of development when neurobehavioral function is organised and subsequently becomes difficult to change, including the prenatal period, the neonatal period, early childhood, and adolescence. Studies are just beginning into how and when changes can be reversed or mitigated (Karatsoreos & McEwen 2013).

### ***(iii) Genetics***

The interplay between genes and the environment is the subject of recent research showing that genes can bias the individual toward reacting in certain ways to stressors (Shonkoff, Boyce and McEwen, 2009). It is recognised that there are genetically based differences in neurotransmitters, which can be responsible for the processing of information or level of arousal. For instance, popularly known as the 'Warrior Gene', the MAOA-L is a variant of the MAOA gene on the X-chromosome and is known to affect behavioural responses, and in particular can be found in individuals who enjoy high risk taking activities (Caspi et al, 2002). It has also been linked to violent behavior in adulthood but only when the individual had been raised in a physically abusive environment. In other words, not all those individuals with this gene variant display risk taking or aggressive behaviours, demonstrating the importance of environmental influences on genetic dispositions. Furthermore, the positive influence of genetic variation in resilient functioning in non-abused children has been demonstrated, but it has been shown to have a negligible effect on abused children, suggesting developmental experiences are the major factor in gene-environment interactions (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2012; Cicchetti and Curtis, 2006). Rutter (2013) suggested that as opposed to having a definitive direct influence on resilience, genes might influence how an individual responds to the environment. The individual's responses are in turn likely to be influenced by their experiences and perceptions.

Rutter (2013) postulates that the genes associated with vulnerability may also be more responsive to therapeutic interventions. This would appear to be evidenced in the UK Resiliency Programme Project (Challen et al, 2009)

findings where the greatest influence of the resiliency programme was with the children most affected by adversity.

### **1.82 Ecological models of resilience**

The second distinct development in understanding the concept of resilience is the development of ecological models. The International Resilience Project (Ungar, 2005) conducted a large-scale international mixed methods study of over 1500 youth across 11 countries, specifically looking at the influence of culture and context on the development of resilience. Participants were selected for their exposure to three or more risk factors (exposure to violence, institutionalisation, mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, social dislocation, war or political turmoil), but who had demonstrated adaptive coping skills. The study developed the 'Child and Youth Resilience Measure' (CYRM), a questionnaire designed to include locally relevant questions to gain an accurate ecological measure of resilience. This has three significant categories: 1) Individual factors – personal skills, social skills, and peer support; 2) Care giving - physical and psychological; 3) Contextual factors – religion, culture and education. Ungar highlighted how despite facing similar adversities, there was great difference in how the youth coped and what ecological factors of resilience they accessed.

Ungar, Ghazinour and Richter (2013) have recently developed a systemic ecological theory of resilience, based on provision of resources. They stress that instead of trying to change an individual's ability to cope, interventions should focus on changing the social and physical stressors on the young person, putting the emphasis on society to provide resources to children and families. They suggest further research into which communal and institutional

resources improve developmental outcomes, and which are meaningful in different cultures and contexts.

### **1.83 Multi Systems or Multilevel models of resilience**

The third development is where resilience is viewed as a multilevel dynamic developmental and interactional process that influences, and is influenced by, environmental, biological and psychological functioning before, during and following times of adversity, stress, or trauma. It is argued that assessing resilience requires a multilevel approach that looks beyond individuals to multiple systems of interactions, including family, school, neighbourhood, community and culture (Wright and Masten, 2005), genetics, ecological factors, and neurobehavioural development (Cicchetti, 2013; Rutter, 2000). Resultant interventions must also be multilevel, targeting family dynamics, peer group support, and social equality (Betancourt, Meyers-Ohki, Charrow and Hansen, 2013). Studies stress that interventions to improve resilience whilst integrating multiple systems of analysis, must move away from risk and protective factors and concentrate on developing multiple pathways, sensitive to context and time, that offer synergistic impact through linking the interconnecting adaptive systems of the individual, family, school, community, spiritual, and society (Ager, 2013; Masten & Narayan, 2012; Masten, 2011). Interventions will depend on the many interrelated systems that lead to questions such as when and how are resources important, how to measure human experience, and help individuals and communities withstand adversity. In particular, Rutter (2013) and Flouri et al (2010) both stress the importance of synergist interventions including a focus on family warmth and relationships.

### **1.84 A constructivist understanding of resilience**

The fourth important area is a constructivist understanding of resilience. Ungar (2008) proposes a constructivist view of resilience that develops the previously accepted ecological models. He argues that ecological models of resilience emphasise causal links, but highlights they do not take into account an individual's multiple understandings and perceptions of their experiences and environments. A constructivist interpretation has a focus on the multitude of different contextually relevant definitions of positive adaptation. In other words, it is suggested that a local understanding of resilience should be based on local discourse and knowledge of local context and culture, rather than objective measures, in order to understand resilience in a way that is meaningful to the individual and which can promote personalised and locally relevant interventions. The more locally contextualised research is, the better it fits with the constructivist interpretations of resilience. Instead of resilience being seen as an objective state or process, Ungar (2008; 2010; 2012) argues using a phenomenological account allows for four propositions that are constructivist and will inform resilience research: (i) global, cultural and contextually specific aspects of individual's lives contribute to their resilience; (ii) resilience is a non-linear concept, with levels of influence varying in relation to other aspects of life; (iii) the interrelated variables in an individual's life will reflect their culture and context (and, an interpretivist constructivist would argue, their perceptions); (iv) specific aspects of resilience will be more useful when culturally and contextually relevant.

Resilience may be seen as a successful negotiation by individuals to ways to help them achieve emotional and physical health, and depends on the

individual's social construction of well-being and how they can achieve it within their own context. It is determined through dynamic and variable interweaving systemic, non-hierarchical relationships between risk and protective factors, across local and global cultures. The individual's constructs, based on their experiences and perceptions, will influence their understanding and perspective of their own interactions with factors of resilience.

### **1.9 Cautions in the study of resilience**

There are a number of cautions around studies of resilience that should be acknowledged.

(i) The variability in definitions, leading to difficulties in comparative and empirical studies, along with the effect of multilevel interactions, and the instability of the phenomena of resilience, questions whether resilience is a scientific construct (Masten, 2001; Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker, 2000).

(ii) Another difficulty with measuring resilience is that factors related to resilience may be relevant only to specific developmental stages, and may lead to contradictory evidence – for example what aids resilience in one area of life may not be helpful in another area of life, and what may affect an individual at one point may not affect them at another point in time. There is general agreement about risk and protective factors, but no universal set that is applicable to all children, across cultures, at all points in their life (Ungar, 2008).

(iii) Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) criticise the term 'protective' as being too simplistic and unilateral, and they suggest that a number of suffixes (e.g. 'protective-stabilizing') to be used to explain the different effects of protective

factors. However, this does not take into account the myriad of different culturally specific and locally relevant intervening variables which the individual then contextualises and interprets based on their experiences and view of the world.

(iv) The multidimensional nature of resilience where an individual can appear resilient in one situation or category but not in another has also been evidence against the validity of the construct of resilience. However, developmental outcomes are not consistent across all trajectories, and therefore it is unsurprising that resilience is shown more in some developmental outcomes than others (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000; Flouri et al, 2010).

(v) The popular definition of resilience as ‘the ability to bounce back’ emphasises that, in order for resilience to exist, there must have been exposure to significant risks. It suggests resilience is a within-child characteristic. An alternative, interpretivist constructivist perspective, may construe that a young person who has ‘bounced back’ from adversity has demonstrated their resilience in a way that is recognisable to us through our interpretation of acceptable adaptation. Young people with different life experiences may find alternative ways of adapting to adversity. Risks and protective factors differ in their impact according to the interplay of intervening variables and experiences, and adaptation may not always be achieved in a socially acceptable way. Furthermore, different researchers will also, according to the social constructivist perspective, have a different subjective perception of the meanings of each of these factors, and communicate them in different ways. The term ‘bouncing back’ also suggests that the young

person had initially succumbed to adversity. This suggests that those young people who do not succumb to, or have not experienced, adverse situations are not resilient. It is arguable that it is more truthful to say they have not demonstrated their resilience.

(vi) Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) and Masten (2001) caution against interpreting resilience as an individual trait.

(vii) Ecological models were informed by systems theory and suggest predictable interactions between risk and protective factors showing patterns of circularity. However, despite many interventions to promote resilience and improve outcomes for young people, there has not been the progress hoped for in predicting outcomes. This is largely because resilience is not the product of predictable interactions between systems (Ungar, 2010; Flouri et al, 2012; Mavroveli & Tzavidis, 2012).

Despite all the above difficulties, there is sufficient evidence for resilience to be an important construct, which needs further study.

### **1.10 The Importance of Children's Views and Perceptions**

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) emphasises the right of children to express their views in all matters affecting them, and for these views to be given due weight. In response, the UK has subsequently seen many political reforms and guidelines to recording children and young people's voices, including: the Children's Act (DoH, 1989), the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015), the SEN Toolkit (DfES, 2001), Every Child Matter's (DfES 2003), and the Children and Family Act (DfE, 2014).

Lundy (2007) highlighted the recognised benefits to pupil participation,



including engagement, motivation and self-esteem, were positively linked to mental health and wellbeing. She also highlighted that despite government rhetoric, the 2005 UN Committee that oversees the rights of children criticised the UK for not taking the views of the child into consideration in exclusions.

There is still very little literature on children's views and perceptions (O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, & Torstensson, 2011; Lundy 2007; Ager, 2013). Many authors (Lundy, 2007, MacConville, 2007 and Noble et al, 2005) agree the opinions of young people with SEN are rarely asked for, and when they are consulted the process is tokenistic and their views largely ignored, silenced by professional discourses, reducing pupils to passive recipients of specialist services.

Prout (2000) suggests that the drive towards, and the resistance against, greater participation of children is a reflection of a generalised tension between control and self-realisation. On the one hand, there is an increasing tendency to see children as individuals with a capacity for growing independence and self-realisation and, on the other, there is greater surveillance, control and regulation of children. Sellman (2009) reflects this view with his observation that some schools fear a loss of control by seeking pupil views, particularly if those pupils have BESD.

It is generally agreed that the way in which children are engaged in having their views heard and acted on is important (Hill, 2006). Studies have reported the need for children and young people to feel they are being heard and valued (McCluskey et al, 2013), and, having been consulted, need to see their views being acted on in influencing change (Lundy, 2007).

### **1.11 Research Aims**

The aim of the study is to explore, in depth, the views, perceptions and experiences relating to local ecological factors of resilience, of four young people in a PRU.

The study is based on the premise that resilience should be understood as a dynamic construct, where multisystem ecological factors of resilience are dependent on an individual's multiple understandings and perceptions of their experiences and environments. The research aim is therefore developed from the supposition that it is only through listening to and appreciating young people's experiences that we will begin to understand their perspectives of the influence of individual, family, community and cultural factors involved in developing aspects of resilience. Therefore, in-depth semi-structured interviews were held and analysed using IPA. This analysis is presented and related to existing literature and research, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences of ecological factors that interact in developing aspects of resilience.

It is anticipated that the study will provide rich information on the participants' experiences, a greater understanding of specific aspects of resilience most relevant for each of the individuals in achieving positive outcomes, and the meaning that each of the young people ascribe to these factors of resilience. It is further hoped the study will provide and demonstrate the usefulness of viewing resilience as a multilevel dynamic concept overlaid by the interpretivist constructivist perceptive. It is also anticipated the study will influence EP practice in listening to the views and experiences of children and young people when considering aspects of resilience.

### **1.12 Research question**

There is only one research question to be answered, reflecting the idiographic and analytical nature of the research:

‘What are the experiences and views of four young people at a Pupil Referral Unit in relation to locally available ecological factors of resilience?’

### **1.13 Scope and limitations of the study**

This study uses four in-depth individual interviews with young people in a PRU to provide a rich picture of their views and experiences in regard to locally available resources that may be seen as factors of resilience. The study ascribes to an interpretivist constructivist multisystem ecological model of resilience. It uses IPA to analyse and interpret the transcripts of the interviews to produce themes, which are related to literature. It does not claim to produce generalizable results, but instead has a small number of participants reflecting IPA’s commitment to idiography.

### **1.14 Personal Reflection**

My journey to this research begins long ago, and also explains my pathway to working as an Educational Psychologist. I originally worked in forensic psychology, in a secure unit, where I undertook some research into the clients’ perspectives of the aetiology of their mental health issues. I was surprised that taking case histories did not include asking the clients for their perspectives and understandings of the development of their mental health issues, and how they had got to be where they were. My small-scale research indicated that the majority of clients experienced feelings of isolation or feeling ‘different’ in some way whilst they were at school. The study had many flaws, but started my interest into two areas:

- (i) The importance of taking an interpretivist constructivist perspective in working psychologically with people, recognising that the meanings they give their world will have been interpreted and constructed through their experiences and perspectives of their interactions with others in a variety of multilayered systems, and our understanding of those views will require an interpretivist approach.
- (ii) This was coupled with a desire to understand why some young people developed mental health issues and others did not.

This developed into an interest in resilience, and how an understanding of individual's perspectives of their situations may be used to improve their outcomes. I trained as an educational psychologist, with specific interests in emotional well-being, resilience, and listening to the experiences and perspectives of young people.

## **Chapter 2 - A critical review of current literature**

### **2.1 Introduction to literature review**

This chapter presents a critical and systematic review of the current literature on (i) the resilience of children and young people in a PRU, or with EBSD but not in a PRU, and (ii) seeking the views and perspectives of children and young people in a PRU or with EBSD but not in a PRU.

Firstly, the method of systematic literature search is described and the appraising of included studies explained. Then the studies will be examined in depth. Finally, the need for further research is explained and research questions for this research are outlined.

### **2.2 Method of systematic review**

The aim of the literature review was to systemically and critically review all literature pertinent to the research question, 'What are the experiences and views of four young people at a Pupil Referral Unit in relation to locally available ecological factors of resilience?'

A systematic review was undertaken in December 2013 and updated in April and June 2014. The systematic literature search was conducted in four stages, as described below.

**Stage 1:** The first step in this stage was to identify the databases and limiters used in the literature search. The table below details the bibliographic databases used and how they are relevant to the topic.

Table 1. Data bases searched

- (i) PsychINFO – provides relevant psychological literature to present date.
- (ii) Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection – provides topics such as emotional and behavioral characteristics, psychiatry and psychology, mental processes, anthropology, and observational and experimental methods.
- (iii) PsycArticles (via EBSCOhost) – provides full-text articles from journals published by the American Psychological Association, as American research on resilience may be relevant to my research project.
- (iv) PsycBOOKS (via EBSCOhost) - provides details of books published by the American Psychological Association.
- (v) SocINDEX provides sociology research database.

The following limitations were used in the searches:

Table 2. Limiters used in literature search

- Search for keywords in title and abstract to focus the search to the most relevant to the topic and return manageable numbers.
- Date: Post 2000 to ensure literature is relevant.
- English language only.
- Peer reviewed.
- In addition, only research from UK, USA, Canada and Australia was considered to be culturally relevant to this research.

The second step in this stage was to decide on the breadth of the search, to ensure all relevant material was included. As there is so little literature

available on the resilience of children and young people in a PRU, the search was extended to include literature on the resilience of children with EBSD and seeking children's views. Therefore it included all studies of:

- (i) Resilience and children and/or young people in a PRU
- (ii) Resilience and children and/or young people with EBSD
- (iii) Views of children and/or young people in a PRU
- (iv) Views of children and/or young people with EBSD

The search terms used were differing terms and phrases, used in multiple combinations, of words relative to the study, such as: PRU, EBSD, Resilience, and Pupil Voice. For example, using the Boolean phrases, 'resilience AND young people', or 'resilience AND pupil referral units'.

The table in Appendix 1 records the details of the systematic literature search, including for each search term, the number of studies identified, the number that initially appeared relevant, the reference if it appeared initially relevant from reading the abstract, the number of references that were not considered relevant, and why, and the number of studies that were inaccessible, or outside of the countries being considered. The total number that looked initially relevant was 34.

**Stage 2:** The references and bibliographies of these were hand searched for further related references in an effort to cover other primary studies. This gave an initial return of 31 studies. The table in Appendix 2 identifies these hand-identified references, which revealed 35 studies.

**Stage 3:** A thorough reading of each of the references was undertaken and each was categorised as whether it was still relevant to the research or not, and why. It was then arranged under broad topic headings, and in

hierarchical order of relevance to this study. This is presented in Appendix 3, which also shows the colour coding used in arranging the references in hierarchical order, with yellow indicating the most relevance to this study (eight studies), green had some relevance to my research question, blue had no relevance, and pink indicated it may be useful in the main body of my thesis but not directly related to the research question.

**Stage 4:** The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) was then used to synthesise and critically appraise the strengths and weaknesses of each of the eight references identified as particularly relevant to this study, to see if it is of high enough quality to be included in the Literature Review. There are ten screening questions, each broken down into sub-questions, which help answer the three main broad questions:

- Are the results of the review valid?
- What are the results?
- Will the results help locally?

The CASP tools allow a scoring process from 1-10 to be applied to the studies, and it is generally considered that those scoring 7-10 are of high quality. Therefore, this was the inclusion criterion set for this study. Appendix 4 gives a table of the systematic critical analysis of the relevant papers using the CASP tools, and Appendix 5 gives a summary table of studies with their CASP score. From eight studies that were subjected to detailed appraisal, six studies scored 7 or above, meaning they were considered robust enough to be subjected to a detailed critical analysis included in the Literature Review. The four main themes from these studies are summarised in the table below:



Table 3. Themes from literature review

Author(s)	Research took place in a PRU?	Resilience	Children and young people have views about what can help them or hinder them in school.	Pupils views are important and can be collated in different ways	Respect between staff and pupils and Relationships are important
Jackson, Whitehead, Wigford (2010).		Yes			Yes
Hart, N. (2013).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pillay, Dunbar-Krige, Mostert (2013).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michael & Frederickson (2013).	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, & Torstensson (2011).			Yes	Yes	Yes
Sellman (2009).			Yes	Yes	Yes

It can be seen there were only three studies that specifically related to resilience, only two of which were in a PRU. One further study looked at children or young people's views and perspectives in a PRU. Three studies were with children with BESD but not in a PRU. A total of five of the studies emphasised the importance of children's views. All six studies stressed the importance of relationships between staff and pupils.

These studies are analysed and synthesised below, using four main headings from CASP.

### **2.3 Studies of resilience in Pupil Referral Units**

The literature search revealed only one study into resilience in a PRU, by Hart (2013).

#### Statement and aims of research

Hart's study focused on what helps children in a PRU, through an exploration into protective factors identified by children and staff. It looks at what protective factors, both within-child and within-PRU, are perceived by staff and children or young people in the PRU to help achieve positive social and academic outcomes. Hart presents literature pointing to protective factors mediating risk and contributing towards positive trajectories for children, but not specifically for social and academic outcomes. The study also explores whether children needed to possess certain within-child factors to facilitate positive outcomes in the PRU, and if there were differences in views between staff and children.

It involved six children aged 9-13 years, and four members of staff, in a PRU, over a period of time.

Hart states that this group of children is important to study as pupil exclusion in mainstream primary and secondary schools continues to be a problem in England (DfES 2007), with excluded pupils facing poor outcomes, including isolation and social exclusion, associated effects of underachievement leading to reduced employment prospects and involvement in petty crime. Hart's study is relevant to my research because it considers the views of children or young people in a PRU about an aspect of resilience (protective factors).

Hart discusses the absence of a universally agreed concept of resilience, and quotes three definitions: (i) the 'capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation, despite challenging or threatening circumstances' (Masten, Best, and Garmezy 1990, p426, in Hill), (ii) 'normal development under difficult conditions' (Fonagy et al. 1994, p233, in Hill), (iii) the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today's world. Hart views 'protective factors' as 'resilience factors' for children in the PRU.

However, Hart positions resilience as based on within-child risk and protective factors; the assertion that risk factors are naturally located within the individual limits the study's perspective of other ecological, systemic, environmental or biological factors. Studies of resilience have been striving to move away from within-child factors, and instead try to understand its multisystem nature. In the discussion section, Hart asserts that the areas in which children make progress in the PRU are within-child skills, such as learning, self-regulation, cooperation and socialising, and questions how successfully these can be generalised to mainstream school. She wonders whether additional within-child characteristics are needed in order to achieve further positive outcomes from the PRU. She quotes the PRU staff speaking about some children having 'the inner capacity' to grow and make progress, and it may have been interesting to explore whether this is a belief staff have created to explain why their strategies and the ethos of the PRU do not help some children. Another staff perception that may have been interesting to

explore further is the staff belief that they can have a greater impact on younger children.

Are the methodology and research design appropriate?

The methodology addresses the goal of the research; it uses a qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews, supported by the use of tools and techniques to facilitate discussion, including scaling and picture sheets. The design and methodology is appropriate, although there is lack of clarity as to which scaling and drawing processes are used.

Participants were selected according to clear criteria of length of time in the PRU, with consideration given to ensuring the young people had been at the PRU long enough to feel settled, and young people coming up to transition were not included. Each young person was interviewed individually, and the interviews were recorded and thematically analysed using QSR NVivo Version 8 software. The deductive approach to data analysis used a codebook as a starting point for organising the data. Codes were formulated in advance of data analysis from pre-existing themes from educational resilience research, as well as preliminary scanning of transcripts, research questions and areas of questioning. Hart explores contradictory data in part, and considers researcher bias.

The study is small, with six children and four adults, which has drawbacks for generalisability. Hart identifies similarities and differences between themes from the staff and children, but does not identify similarities or differences within the responses of the six children. In addition the study addressed children with a 'range of difficulties', which are unfortunately not explored further or linked to their responses.

Hart does not explain her relationship to the PRU, or her role in the PRU, and if she is the EP for the PRU how this fits with the ethical position, and if she is not a regular member of staff in the PRU, how this may have affected the answers the young people gave to the interviews. Other ethical issues of permission and consent are addressed with great clarity and detail.

Is there a clear statement of findings?

The study's findings are explicit, with potential protective factors of the PRU, as identified by children and staff, identified under the main themes of (a) relationships, (b) teaching and learning, (c) expectations, and (d) environment including small class sizes. The study may have been made richer by including quotes from the children's views about each of these areas.

The article did not record how the children's views in these areas related to promoting positive social and academic outcomes.

Hart discusses the credibility of the findings, highlighting that it is rigorous because the main questions were formed from existing research in educational resilience; however, this may also be seen as a criticism of the study, as the pre-determined themes may have risked predetermining the findings to look for these themes.

The researcher says she has triangulated the young people's responses with the staff responses, but it would be interesting to know more about the views of each. She discusses her results in relation to professional practice and reintegration and the potential of changing PRU environments for children. Hart's main conclusions are that children's voices are important in identifying factors that will help them in their transition to mainstream school, and stressed the importance of relationships with staff in schools. She describes

the implications for school systems, and calls for professionals to adopt 'resilience perspectives based around principles of positive psychology and systemic ways of thinking'.

#### How valuable is the research?

Hart discusses the evidence for themes in educational research being replicated in the PRU as the unique contribution the study. She identified future research areas including, (i) how the identified protective factors may operate to help the child and how they may be interrelated, (ii) a focus on reintegration.

Hart's study cannot be generalised to other populations and these results are limited only to the PRU in which it was done. It can, however, be repeated in other PRUs or a replicate study could be carried out in non-EBD schools.

Questions arising from reading this study indicate the need for additional research into exploring young people's views and perceptions in more depth, including how the positive adult-pupil relationship generated in the PRU may be extended or generalised to other educational environments, and further thinking around the influence of multilevel systems on resilience.

## **2.4 Studies of resilience in children with BESD**

The literature search revealed only one study into the area of resilience in children and young people with BESD, that of Jackson, Whitehead and Wigford (2010).

#### Statement and aims of research

The goal of the research was to determine whether Looked After Children (LAC) will have lower resilience and more negative self-perceptions than non-LAC, and that LAC will have lower attainment scores than non-LAC. It has a

particular focus on whether LAC in the EBSD school would have significantly lower scores on a range of assessments, including academic attainment, resilience and self-perceptions.

The participants were LAC in a school for EBSD children. The authors demonstrate the need for the research with literature demonstrating the poor outcomes for LAC in all domains and as the most vulnerable group in education. It is relevant to the current research project through its discussions on resilience and young people in an EBSD school.

The authors' emphasis on resilience is based on the premise that resilience is a process that enables individuals to achieve positive outcomes. The study focuses on resilience as a process rather than a set of innate qualities, which Hart had suggested as being necessary for resilience. Jackson et al acknowledge the difficulties in agreeing definitions of resilience, and take an ecological perspective of resilience, stressing the importance of resilience in the context of culture, context and perception of experience. The authors define resilience as: 'a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development' (Masten, 2001), and continue that positive outcomes are in relation to 'social competence or successful development', which is arguably misleading, as there are other young people who may be resilient but not socially competent, or may have aspects of developmental delay but still be resilient. They highlight that there are two fundamental constructs in the concept of resilience: the notion of adversity or risk, and positive outcomes regarding social competence or successful development. The study does not give a conceptual understanding of how the 'phenomena' is achieved.

Are the methodology and research design appropriate?

The study by Jackson et al describes a clear methodology, enabling replication of the study if desired. The research uses a quantitative design, which was justified by the authors as being a good fit with the objectives of the research. It clearly outlines the quantitative measures used: the WIAT-II for literacy and numeracy scores, the Resiliency Scales, and the All About Me questionnaires.

The Resiliency Scales (Prince-Embry, 2006) were used, which is a 54 question scale based on the assumption of three factors underlying the construct of resilience: Mastery and Self-Efficacy, Relatedness, and Emotional Reactivity, which can lead to measures of Vulnerability and Resource (strengths). Despite the study focusing on resilience as a process rather than a set of innate qualities, the Resiliency Scales is a within-child measurement of resilience.

The same researchers conducted each of the assessments over a four-week period with the same young people to establish relationships. The study used a selection of standardised questionnaires and assessment materials, but there does not appear to have been any scope for the young people to speak freely about their experiences, which may have added a rich picture of their views to the research. The researchers described the sampling procedure clearly, with explanations as to why the participants were selected. The sample size was small, with four LAC and ten non-LAC participants, too small to generalise, and whilst the study setting was appropriate for the study, there would be benefits from being repeated with larger sample sizes, and in a range of educational settings.



Ethical issues are clearly addressed in this journal article. It is not clear that the researchers have considered their influence in the study, nor is the relationship between the researchers and the participants fully explained – for instance, it is not clear if any of the researchers were regular EPs in the school. The authors state a familiar adult doing assessments would have been beneficial, and that changes to design could have been made through involving the participants. There is no explanation given about the details given to participants about the study. The authors noted that a number of children chose not to participate in the study and many found it hard to persevere with the assessment measures. The authors made suggestions for improvement of the research design: using a familiar adult, involving the children more in design, and offering rewards.

Is there a clear statement of findings?

The data analysis is clearly set out with evidence to support the main findings, which were:

- (i) The LAC had lower levels of resilience, than non-LAC: The Resiliency Scales results suggest that, within this EBD population, LAC have a significantly lower Resource Index and higher Vulnerability than non-LAC.
- (ii) The findings did not support the second hypothesis that LAC will have lower attainment scores than non-LAC. The attainment results suggest that, within this EBD population, LAC have significantly higher levels of attainment in Word Reading, Pseudoword Decoding and Spelling than non-LAC. This contradictory data is explored but more explanation of why the LAC scored higher than the non-LAC children in the WIAT tests would have been useful; it may have been the effects of a very small sample size (four LAC, ten non-

LAC), which makes any generalisations inappropriate.

(iii) The study predicted that LAC would have more negative self-perceptions than non-LAC, which was not the case. The responses to the “All About Me” questions did not indicate a more negative self-perception but there were differences between the two groups. The LAC were found to be more likely than non-LAC to use attributes that relate to other people when describing themselves. This could suggest that these children are more likely to define themselves in relation to others as their relationships with others are particularly salient, but not that they had more negative self-perceptions.

#### How valuable is the research?

The authors discussed the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding in terms of being the only study to look at resilience and attainment of LAC children in an EBD school. They identify new areas where research is necessary – (i) literacy in EBD schools, (ii) measures for LAC and non-LAC in a mainstream school. (iii) levels of risk and protective factors for each child in order to develop resilience pathways. The authors discussed how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered how the research can be used initially through replicating the study in non-EBD schools.

The authors have suggested that EPs should work with LAC children and young people, schools and parents/carers, but have unfortunately not given suggestions as to what programmes they should follow or what strategic changes they could support.

The authors suggest that EBSD schools focus more on emotional and behavioural regulation than on academic attainment; however, raising literacy

achievement has been linked with resilience, and raising expectations and achievements of children and young people in PRUs is a government aim.

The authors note that future studies should look more closely at the level of risk and protective factors for each child in the EBSD school in order to give greater insight into how resilience pathways develop.

The outcomes of this study suggest that future interventions could develop the process of resilience at an individual level, for groups of children and at a whole-school level. At an individual level the Resiliency Scales could be used to highlight each child's strengths and difficulties and these scales could be used for further monitoring in the process of developing resilience. They do not give further detail to their thoughts of resilience as a construct beyond seeing it and measuring it as a within-child construct.

## **2.5 Studies eliciting pupils' views in Pupil Referral Units**

There were two studies that looked at eliciting pupils' views in PRUs. The first is by Michael and Frederickson (2013).

### Statement and aims of research

The goal of the research was to hear the views of pupils with BESD regarding the enablers and barriers to positive outcomes in alternative provision. The authors highlight the importance of their study in finding ways to explore how to improve academic and social-emotional outcomes in a PRU, given the international negative social and academic outcomes for students with EBSD, and concerns about the quality of alternative provision. They note there were only two previous studies on pupil voice regarding enablers and barriers to achievement of outcomes (Lloyd and O'Regan 1999 and Hill 1997). Enablers from those studies were identified as positive relationships with staff and

small groups, both of which were also identified by Hart (2013) in her study. Identified barriers were difficulties with peers, staff knowledge and understanding of EBSD and unfair discipline.

The study has sixteen participants aged 12-16 years old in two PRUs in London. Both groups had small sample sizes and lacked generalizability. The study uses semi-structured interviews with prompts to elicit pupil views about potential enablers and barriers to achieving positive outcomes in PRUs.

Are the methodology and research design appropriate?

The study clearly explains how the data was collected. Two PRUs were involved in the research, and the recruitment of participants is well described with sixteen participants from across both PRUs. Ethical procedures were followed, including seeking verbal or written consent from the parents/carers before the participants were approached.

The authors describe using a script in the interviews for the semi-structured interview to allow flexibility for the participants. The interview schedule was piloted. The authors describe using a focus group after the initial thematic analysis to check validity and robustness of the themes they had extracted from the interviews. The young people who took part in the interviews and the focus groups are reported as being keen to highlight they were individuals and did not necessarily want themes drawn from across all the responses.

The research uses clear, appropriate and explicit qualitative methodology of semi-structured interviews to illuminate the views and subjective experiences of the participants. The study asked questions about the children and young people's experiences at the PRU, and what they had found to be helpful and not helpful in supporting their behaviour, learning and emotional needs. It

used pre-set prompts and pre-coding for barriers and enablers, and primarily a deductive approach to thematic analysis because the coding was designed to identify particular features: perceived enablers and barriers identified from the two earlier research studies. The authors note that it also had a 'data-driven perspective', with new factors identified not previously reported in the literature.

The authors critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during the thematic analysis. There were areas of methodology that were less clear. It is not clear if or how the authors responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of changes in the research design. There are no details of how the research was explained to participants or how the researchers discussed issues raised by the study.

Is there a clear statement of findings?

The authors provide a thematic map to give a clear outline of the findings. The themes are clearly presented, but there are no alternatives presented. The findings are consistent with the aim of the research, to gain the views of the young people with regard to enablers and barriers to outcomes in the PRU.

Five themes were identified as enabling factors – relationships (with teachers, families and peers), the interesting curriculum, consistent and fair discipline, the learning environment and self. It is reported that pupils found a curriculum that was relevant to them as individuals important, and pupils also felt that a non-challenging level of academic work was reported as important to some participants, with work set at a level that the learners can engage with. Two examples are given of the 'pupil voice' in describing the alternative

curriculum provision on offer. The size of the learning environment was important for some of the young people, and interestingly one pupil commented about small class sizes as he gets more one to one time – this may also link to their theme of relationships being important to the young people in the PRU, and in managing anxiety associated with supported learning. The study does not consider these explanations, as it does not seem to have strived to extend the participants explanations in the interviews. The barriers the young people described from their experiences were: disruptive behaviour of peers and themselves recognised as a barrier to learning; unfair treatment by staff, including feeling sanctions were unfair and getting blamed for things they did not do; and failure to individualise the learning environment enough to meet their interests. Interestingly these are the barriers that are often described in mainstream schools by young people with EBSD, and it may be that further research could be carried out into the pupils' perspectives of these feelings. The authors also noted one pupil's concerns about being labeled by being in the PRU and of not achieving her academic potential, which reflects government concerns (Ofsted 2011).

The authors noted that other themes were elicited from the data that they had not predicted but they only identify one of these, which was 'ideas for change' and was a theme relating to both enablers and barriers. Unfortunately it is not expanded upon. The study also reports comments on discipline being effective because it is consistent, although some young people also found it to be unfair at times. However, whilst it is not explored with the young people as to why this was important to them, it may be, we could surmise, that consistent boundaries and discipline allow them to feel the environment is

more predictable, allowing them to feel safe, and be less vigilant at times. However, the study does not allow this depth of individual views and perspectives, nor allow for the variety of individual responses.

#### How valuable is the research?

The authors discussed the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge. They identified that their study makes clear the need for the EP to promote and support the implementation of preventative strategies and positive relationships between teachers and pupils at alternative provisions. They suggest that the research identified the need for learning mentors, a varied curriculum, the coaching of young people on alternative responses, and the importance of involving the pupils themselves in planning and implementing changes.

Future research is identified as the need to explore young people's perceptions of the influence of broader family and community factors more systematically. The authors do not address the transferability of this study to other populations.

The second study in the area of eliciting pupil's views in PRUs that will be reviewed is by Pillay, Dunbar-Krige and Mostert (2013).

#### Statement and aims of research

The study by Pillay, Dunbar-Krige and Mostert (2013) seeks to firstly understand the 'phenomenon of reintegration regression' by listening to and analysing the experiences of learners with EBSD who are reintegrated into mainstream education, and secondly how can understanding of these experiences contribute to the development of a resilience-based reintegration programme.

The study was important because it seeks the views of young people who had been in a PRU, and because it focuses on how difficult successful reintegration is. It stresses that the reintegration programmes that exist do not take into account of real-life experiences of those learners during the reintegration period. The authors state that current literature lacks explanations for the degeneration of the 'good-to-fit' behaviour, and that an explanation may be facilitated through listening to children and young people's experiences.

The study had thirteen participants who were learners with EBSD between the ages of 11 and 14 years who had been reintegrated back into four schools. A qualitative design was used, using incomplete sentences and a life essay about their reintegration experiences. Four were then invited to participate in unstructured interviews alongside professionals with an interest in the reintegration of learners. Parents and teachers were asked to respond to questions by email.

This is an important study in relation to my research as it looks at the views of children and young people with EBSD who had been excluded and in a PRU, in consideration of factors that may influence a successful reintegration back into the mainstream school. The authors stated the aim of the research was to develop a reintegration programme designed to help policy makers and practitioners improve the success of reintegration. This article discusses resilience in depth, but not always very clearly. It frames resilience in four levels, reflective of a multisystem ecological concept of resilience:

- (i) Microsystemic resilience, where the influence of the family, peers, the neighbourhood, community and the influence of significant



adults all pose both promotive and risk factors in the learner's development.

- (ii) Mesosystemic resilience provides an understanding of the interconnectivity of risk and promotive factors within the relationships within the learner's microsystems, such as the relationships between the family, school, peers and community contribute to the balance between risk and promotive factors.
- (iii) Exosystemic resilience includes the larger social system that has an impact on the development of the learner. Parents' workplaces, their schedules and related economic stressors have an impact on the learner. In addition, exosystems such as community-based resources, quality schooling, healthcare systems and opportunities to display talents (Ungar 2008) directly influence the developing resilience of a young person. Exosystemic resilience explores the balance between these systems as promotive and risk factors.
- (iv) Macrosystemic resilience encapsulates the ideology, cultural values, customs and laws of the greater community within which the learner develops. The combined influence of cultural, political and social factors on the developing individual's perceptions of risk factors is significant (Ungar et al. 2011). The influence of government policies, legislation and government-sponsored initiatives in education, such as *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) in England, contribute to the risk trajectory of the developing young person.

They describe resilience as a balance between risk and promotive factors

within a biological predisposition and the environment in which development takes place. However, having described a multisystem view of resilience, they then state that the individual's resilience depends on their ability to access the promotive factors within 'interpersonal relationships', after Boydon and Mann (2005). This does stress the importance of relationships in resilience, but the reduction to a 'within-child' concept of determining resilience seems at odds with their multisystem model they proposed.

Are the methodology and research design appropriate?

The authors have stated their position as undertaking a phenomenological enquiry within an interpretivist constructivist paradigm. The qualitative research seeks the views of children, parents and staff about reintegration into mainstream school, and is appropriate to meet the aims of the research. The researchers described the purposive selection of young people who had been reintegrated into mainstream school from a PRU during the previous twelve months. This seemed a long time after the transition to have interviewed the young people, and may well have affected the young people's views and perceptions.

There were thirteen learners aged 11-14 years who were reintegrated to school, four were further selected to participate in unstructured interviews; an unspecified number of parents and teachers completed a questionnaire; and there were additional interviews with three lead professionals. There is no further discussion around the recruitment of the participants. It is not clear if any learners whose reintegration was not successful were interviewed.

The data collection was life essays, sentence completion, unstructured interviews, parental and teacher questionnaires, and interviews with lead

professionals. The methodology is clear and explicit. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; interviews were continued to the point of saturation.

It is not clear that the researchers considered their influence although the primary researcher was introduced to the students as a student researcher in order to avoid the teacher-student dynamic, suggesting unreported consideration of impact and influence.

Nothing is written about changes to design, and there are no details about the explanation given to participants. Details of any issues raised by the study are not discussed by the researcher, neither is it clear if ethical approval was sought. There is no description of the analysis used in the study. No contradictory data is examined, and researcher bias is not really considered to any extent.

#### Is there a clear statement of findings?

The main findings fall into three areas:

(i) There were three main experiences explicit amongst the learners with EBSD on their reintegration back into mainstream school: emotional, relationship and 'processual' experiences, which acted as both promotive and risk factors. Results pointed towards risk factors as having the most significant impact. The authors state that anger and other strong emotions, such as anxiety, were impeding for the young people in reintegration. Family and peer relationships are discussed in the article, with both viewed as having risk and promotive factors. The authors state that the influence of peers and peer groups can have the least positive influence on the risk trajectory of learners with EBSD. These peer groups include those in the local

community. It was noted that more successful positive peer relationships, in the transition back to mainstream schooling, were formed when the learner was actively paired with a positive peer group by the school.

The authors noted that all the participants identified at least one adult with whom they felt a promotive relationship that mediated feelings of anger and anxiety, and a source of resilience if they were in trouble. However the authors found that unstructured free access to that adult led to problems around boundaries such as leaving lessons. Equally the participants all identified unconstructive relationships with adults in the school, with the authors feeling there was a lack of respect on both sides. It demonstrates a lack of understanding from some mainstream class teachers, and Pillay et al suggest teachers' mindsets need to be changed through training on a resilience based reintegration programme.

(ii) The authors suggest reintegration should take place over time. The main theme was the change of trusting atmosphere at the PRU to the mainstream emphasis on maximising attainment rather than relationship building.

(ii) The authors put forward a new bioecological resilience theory, which is not clearly explained. Their research is, they state, based on the premise of bioecological theory of interactions between humans and the environment; They combined both theories into one they called 'bioecological resilience'.

The conclusion is that the findings support guidelines for developing resilience-based reintegration programmes that include developing emotional competence, developing promotive relationships and implementing promotive reintegration practices.

The study does not provide a discussion about evidence for and against the

researchers' arguments, but there is discussion on triangulation and credibility of finding, and the findings are discussed in relation to the original research questions. The study has some details of how the research was explained to the participants. Triangulation was used through data collated from learners, some parents, professionals and teachers. Feedback was given to participants.

However, the data analysis is not clearly described. Thematic analysis has been used but it is not clear how the themes were derived from the data. No examination of researcher bias is described. The findings are clearly stated, and the credibility of their findings in terms of triangulation and having an external examiner for themes is highlighted. Three main experiences are described by the young people as being 'explicit' – but it appears that the themes are from a collection of both young people and adult data and it is not clear how or if the themes varied between individuals or between the pupils and teachers, or pupils and parents/carers.

A criticism of the study is the reliance on data gathered by two written tasks – life stories and sentence completion. Writing tasks may have been challenging for the participants and the study may have got different results if they had administered a structured or semi-structured interview, or used visual methods and conversation for eliciting life stories.

The authors have not described all their findings in enough depth. They state that they provide a new theoretical perspective called bioecological resilience to help understand young people's experiences, but the theoretical perspective is not clear or persuasive. They also briefly describe the implications for reintegration and a reintegration programme, but without

depth. However, despite reservations, the perspectives of the young people about their understanding of risk and promotive factors are important in this area of research.

#### How valuable is the research?

The authors discussed the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge by proposing a new theory of bioecological theory and resilience theory combined to make a theory of bioecological resilience. The study identifies new areas where research is necessary, including the impact of learners' underlying mental health issues, an in-depth understanding of the impact of absence of parenting skills, and possible contradictions in learner-teacher relationships.

The study discusses how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered how to plan a reintegration programme from a PRU to a mainstream school. Unfortunately there is little information on the suggested programme.

## **2.6 Studies eliciting pupils' views with EBSD**

There were two studies identified in the literature search in this area.

The first is by O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton and Torstensson (2011), and although not specifically concerned with children in PRUs, is relevant to my research nonetheless because it describes research into methods of harnessing the voice of the child with EBSD, including their experiences of education. It reports the preliminary findings of a large study.

#### Statement and aims of research

The aim of this study was to listen to the views of young people with EBSD about their needs in terms of educational provision. The authors discuss the

importance of placing the pupil at the heart of data collections, and stress young people should feel empowered by expressing their views. The study explores methods of harnessing the voice of children with EBSD, who had been excluded from school, through a variety of methods, including role-play and games.

The researchers considered it important to undertake the study due to the increasing numbers of EBSD, the difficulties in teaching EBSD pupils, and the importance of relationships between parents and teachers of pupils with EBSD. The relevance to my study is the importance of ascertaining views of pupil's with EBSD.

The intervention and measures of the study were activity sessions run as participatory techniques to bring the participants together to discuss themes, semi-structured interviews, and a time line of their educational journey.

#### Are the methodology and research design appropriate?

O'Connor et al use a constructivist grounded theory approach, within the interpretive tradition. The research is a qualitative participatory study seeking to elicit views. Its methodology is designed to try different methods of engaging young people in expressing their views, which it achieves. The authors describe using activity sessions and interviews, in order to be sure they reflect the diversity of the children's experiences. There is not much detail on the activity sessions and these would be hard to replicate. The interviews include the use of a time line and life grids for the young people to record their educational journey based on critical turning points in education. The authors describe purposive sampling of children or young people identified as having EBSD and excluded from school. The pupils were aged

14-16 years; parents and teachers were interviewed on their experiences of living or working with children and young people with EBSD. There is no indication of number of participants. The authors describe recruitment and research design was discussed with the participants. Grounded theory was used for data analysis and the themes were presented back to the children and young people for robustness. Examples of the observations and of pupil views may have enhanced the study.

It is unclear where the participants were being educated at the time of the research, or where the activities took place. There are no details as to whether the researcher discussed issues raised by the study, or whether ethical approval was sought. Data consisted of limited numbers of observations, education lifelines and semi-structured interviews. Saturation of data is not raised.

The authors discuss methodological and ethical issues, including the need to seek verbal consent from parents/carers after no responses were obtained from the written consent forms. The authors describe using participatory methods of eliciting participants' views, which is beneficial for eliminating the power imbalance between researcher and student, and which are designed to allow them the knowledge needed to give informed consent of participation.

#### Is there a clear statement of findings?

The authors describe their main findings as understanding the issues involved in conducting innovative research strategies for harnessing the voices of pupils with EBSD. The study demonstrates that listening to pupil views enables investigation of the turning point of educational experiences of



children and young people with EBSD. Examples of pupils' and teachers' views are given under the themes of provision, causes and definitions of EBSD, being excluded from school, reintegration and views on how teachers can contribute to the presentation of EBSD. They identified that teacher training, teachers' perceptions, and understanding of EBSD will all impact on the educational journey of children and children or young people with EBSD. This can be visualized through using a life-grid to help them begin to think about their journey to where they are and options for their future selves.

The study clearly states the advantages of rigorously listening to children's views, but may have benefited from analysis of how those views may be different or enhanced through these methods as opposed to other methods.

#### How valuable is the research?

The authors do not discuss the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or identify where new areas of research are necessary. There are no discussions as to transference of findings to other populations. However, although the authors do not address these, there clearly is research needed into robust ways of seeking children's views, from different populations, in different environments. The most useful part of this study that can be replicated and used by EPs with their work with children and young people experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties in school may be the visual education-life grid, for young people to record their educational journey based on critical turning points in education.

The second study revealed by my literature search in this area is that of Sellman (2009), whose study into the exploration of pupil voice and using pupils as lead researchers raises important issues relevant to my research.

### Statement and aims of research

Sellman's research investigated the processes involved in the use of student voice in an EBSD school to review the school's behaviour policy. Sellman positions the research in the wider context of the importance of children and young people expressing their views in all areas of their lives, but in particular the need for children with EBSD to be active in expressing their views about their educational experiences. He stresses the importance of listening to and empowering children and young people in order to improve relationships between teachers/pupils, learning and other skills such as communication skills and empowerment. Sellman stresses students can be active researchers in this process. His research gave a group of pupils in an EBSD special school the chance to be 'students as researchers'. The results indicated that the pupil participants could be very articulate about their experiences, and raised critical issues and questions.

### Are the methodology and research design appropriate?

Sellman's design sought to involve pupils as active researchers, to empower them in making decisions in school organisation. Sellman used focus groups with six pupils aged 13-16 years, who volunteered following a school assembly. He considered his potential bias in the research and highlighted how the presence of an adult may limit the contributions made by the pupils, and consequently positioned himself as a facilitator rather than manager of the group.

Sellman clearly describes key steps to involve pupils as researchers, including an initial meeting to outline the project's purpose, remit, boundaries

and scope, allowing informed oral consent. Letters were sent to each student's parents/carers to obtain their consent.

The focus group discussed behaviour management in the school, and themes from each week were fed back to the group at the beginning of the next group. In addition, the pupils were trained in interview techniques to seek other pupils' perspectives. Sellman clearly describes data collection through tape recordings of the groups and a reflexive journal. The article does not offer data collected from the interviews the pupil-researchers held with other pupils.

Thematic analysis was undertaken using grounded theory, and the themes were regularly shared with the group at the start of each session and at the end of the project. The author describes the difficulties of the group dynamics, which could at times distract the participants from the aim of the study.

#### Is there a clear statement of findings?

The main themes were:

- (i) Positive regard for the school, particularly the structure, regularity and consistency and feeling valued;
- (ii) Restraint: pupils were keen to have one policy for both behaviour management and restraint; the pupils were accepting of the need for restraint but clear they wanted it to be safe and fair, including the use of language by staff;
- (iii) Rewards: pupils didn't like the system but couldn't think of any alternatives;

- (iv) Relationships: rewards and restraints are underpinned by relationships; there was some mistrust of teachers, but generally positive relationships between teachers and pupils;
- (v) Pupils felt that the more challenging a pupil's behaviour, the lower the expectations for that pupil i.e. lack of equality;
- (vi) Pupils equated 'voice' with physical power and physical hierarchy amongst pupils.

The project met its initial aims of allowing pupils to be active participants in the research and elicit their views. The project resulted in the school incorporating the key points from the research report into the school improvement plan, and given the students' concerns, the school undertook immediate staff training about the use of restraint.

Sellman comments that involvement of pupils can foster a sense of membership – which is desirable in all schools but especially in EBSD schools. He notes that the cultural change for schools is considerable, with all challenges magnified in provision for children experiencing EBSD, although he notes that EBSD schools do encourage their students to reflect on their behaviour and contribute to ideas of community living, suggesting the proposed move to involving pupils more in their education is possible.

#### How valuable is the research?

Sellman's research is a single case study with mixed success. However, it highlights that this population of students are not often given the opportunity to engage in pupil empowerment or student voice projects, and yet have both the capability to engage with such processes, and when asked have extremely important messages. Sellman argues that current procedures,

such as the use of restraint, means there is a clear ethical basis for making such consultation standard practice in EBSD schools. He states that schools need to be prepared for feedback that may often be challenging to hear and difficult to implement. Sellman's research is important in focusing future research into the need for high quality relationships combined with consistent and positive communication in EBSD provision.

Sellman's study highlights some of the difficulties of working with group processes with children and young people with EBSD. However, he stresses, that despite these difficulties, it is important to hear their views in order to improve EBSD provision, and, most importantly, highlights the need for children and young people with EBSD to have the opportunity to develop their own views and perceptions on their difficulties, rather than reproducing the dominant cultural voice that their difficulties (e.g. ADHD) are innate biological problems beyond their control.

## **2.7 Conclusion of literature review**

The studies here have been critically reviewed, with a systematic type approach using CASP. The literature search revealed only one study into resilience and children and young people in PRUs, and two other studies into related areas of resilience in children and young people with BESD. Three other studies were with BESD children and focused on hearing the voice of the child. The literature shows the importance of listening to these views, despite associated challenges, and how valuable these voices are in helping us develop an understanding of their perspectives of their lives. The review showed that there is a need for research into in-depth individual's views of factors of resilience, with a multilevel and ecological view of resilience rather

than seeing it as a within-child construct. None of the studies considered the individualised, chaotic and complex systems that each individual lives in, and the effects that the children's perceptions of those factors will have on their use of available factors of resilience.

## **2.8 This study in relation to the literature reviewed**

This study seeks to address a gap in academic research into the experiences and views of young people in a PRU in relation to resources that are available locally to bolster resilience, taking an interpretivist constructivist perspective to a multilevel ecological model of resilience.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology and Data Collection**

### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter outlines the aims and purpose of this research. It then describes the research design, with justification for the chosen method, and the procedures undertaken. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the method of data analysis are described, and finally issues of validity and ethics will be presented.

### **3.2 Research aims and purpose**

As presented in Chapter 1, the aim and purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences, views and perceptions of young people in a PRU about locally available factors of resilience.

The study is based on the premise of resilience being a dynamic construct, where multisystem ecological factors of resilience are dependant on an individual's perceptions of their experiences and environments. The research aim is therefore developed from the supposition that it is only through listening to and appreciating young people's experiences that we will begin to understand their perspectives of the influence of individual, family, community and cultural factors involved in developing aspects of resilience leading to positive outcomes.

The literature search suggests there is a dearth of academic research in this area.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study uses a qualitative design, with in-depth Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

### **3.31 Rationale for a Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena through the participants' experiences, the meanings they have constructed, and how they understand their world. The research question, '*What are the experiences and views of four young people at a Pupil Referral Unit in relation to locally available ecological factors of resilience?*' is idiographic in nature, and an interpretive analysis of the participants' striving to make sense of those experiences and perceptions will give an insight into which factors of resilience they may be utilising.

Furthermore, the model of resilience ascribed to, where multisystem ecological factors of resilience are dependant on an individual's multiple understandings and perceptions of their experiences and environments, is best understood through an interpretivist constructivist paradigm.

### **3.32 Consideration of alternative qualitative methodology**

IPA, with its focus on lived experiences and how people make sense of and give meaning to their experiences, was considered the most appropriate methodology in reflecting the aim of this study. Before going on to explore IPA in depth, brief descriptions of other qualitative methodology approaches that were considered in the design of this study, and reasons why they were rejected, are given.

#### ***Content or thematic analysis***

Empirical phenomenology such as content or thematic analysis, involves dividing participants' narratives of an experience into units, transforming those units into a description that reflects psychological and phenomenological concepts and, finally, combining these descriptions to



produce an overall summary of the phenomenon being investigated (Silverman, 2013; Robson, 2011). It aims to generate theories that can be replicated. However, the research presented in this study is more concerned with exploring the participants' experiences. IPA allows for a more idiographic focus, and is therefore more compatible with my epistemological position.

### ***Grounded Theory***

Grounded Theory shares some features with phenomenology, but gives greater weight to social processes than individualised accounts (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). It assumes that the analysis will generate one overarching and encompassing theory, with reasons for participants' responses (Fox et al, 2007). IPA, in contrast, focuses on an interpretative understanding of the idiographic data collected, so increasing understanding of how individual participants make sense of their experiences.

### ***Narrative analysis***

There is overlap between narrative analysis and IPA, in that both look at how things are explained (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). However, narrative analysis focuses on how language and stories are used to make sense of and analyse experiences; the interpretative stance adopted by a narrative researcher means that participants' accounts are not viewed as truthful accounts, but as accounts that they have chosen to share. It assumes a narrator and a listener (Fox et al, 2007), rather than a reflexive approach leading to the researcher being inextricably part of the hermeneutic circle, as in IPA. In addition IPA puts a greater emphasis on what is the internal reality for the participant, as that is the reality that holds meaning for them, and therefore narrative analysis was rejected.

### ***Discourse analysis***

Discourse analysis explores the language in participants' descriptions, and how it facilitates and constrains what is communicated about experiences; it is not the substance of what is said that is important, but how it is said (Robson, 2011). In contrast, the interpretative phenomenological approach examines how people attribute meaning to their experiences (Fox et al, 2007; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pringle et al, 2010).

IPA was therefore chosen for this study, as it is the appropriate methodology to answer the research question, and because it is aligned to my epistemological framework, which should be reflected when considering methodology (Smith et al, 2009). A short description of IPA is now provided.

### **3.33 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

IPA was developed to study the lived experiences of individuals, with the premise that we can only understand the world from the individual's point of view through a deep level of interpretative analysis of their experiences, thoughts and feelings (Smith et al, 2009). It seeks to uncover the meaning the participant ascribes to particular phenomena, and what is important to them in their lived worlds, and uses a systematic analytical and interpretative approach (Smith, 2010; Smith et al, 2009; Smith and Osborn, 2007).

IPA is an appropriate methodological approach where the topic is a dynamic concept that is important to and can influence the self. Hence, it is appropriate in the exploration of young people's views of local factors of resilience, when resilience is viewed as a multilevel dynamic concept, needing to be understood at a detailed idiographic and contextual level.

IPA emphasises the inductive process of moving from an individual's data to theory, when interpreting their experiences and views of a phenomenon. A phenomenon may be seen as an event that is registered in consciousness (Smith 2011; Willig, 2008). When participants recall their experiences and views during the interviews, they are sharing phenomena that they cognitively noticed and reflected upon. An interpretative analysis is then undertaken in order to try and make sense of what the young people are communicating and what those experiences may mean to them.

Phenomenologists hold that experience is the product of interpretation, and is therefore constructed through interactions, views and perspectives. Truth is seen as an intersubjective perspective influenced by the social world around us, and thereby needs interpretation. Accordingly the perceptions that an individual holds regarding their experiences are viewed as the primary psychological processes underpinning what people think, feel and do (Barker et al., 2002).

IPA has four theoretical underpinnings, which are outlined below:

- Phenomenology
- Intentionality
- Hermeneutics
- Idiography

### ***Phenomenology***

IPA is phenomenological in that it wishes to explore an individual's interpretation of an event rather than the event itself. Phenomenology has its roots in the philosophy of Husserl, who tried to construct a science to describe consciousness, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al,

2009) and is concerned with the world as individuals experience it at particular times and in particular contexts.

Phenomenology has developed two distinct directions: transcendental and existential. Transcendental phenomenology, developed by Husserl (Smith et al, 2009) is concerned with utilising a process of methodological 'reduction' in order to identify the essential core structures of experience or 'essences'. The term transcendental relates to the requirement to 'transcend' everyday assumptions, and in order to achieve this aim researchers are required to 'bracket' prior assumptions and engage with the universal essence of phenomena. It is used in more descriptive phenomenological approaches (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Husserl's work was developed by later phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al, 2009) to focus on an existential as opposed to a transcendental approach. Existential phenomenology argues that 'bracketing' and 'transcending' everyday assumptions can never be fully achieved because our own beliefs are inextricably linked to our experiences and observations; therefore focus is on understanding 'existence' through lived experience. Consequently a more interpretative position developed to reflect how our involvement with the world is linked to our relationship with it and others (Smith et al, 2009). Sartre (in Smith et al, 2009) extended this, believing the self is not a pre-existing entity that can be discovered through research but is instead an ever-changing representation of the individual, with interpretative phenomenology accounts reflecting the individual's beliefs at that point in time.

### ***Intentionality***

A key notion of the phenomenological approach is intentionality. The phenomenologist Heidegger developed the notion of Dasein, meaning existence in the world or 'being in the world' to describe intentionality, when trying to answer his central question of existence, of what it means to be. He suggests that we are immersed in the world around us, not separate from it, and our engagement with events and people in the world cannot be separated from our subjective experience of it. He believed we build our understanding of the world from our experiences within it. Sartre extended thinking on intentionality as it being inseparable from consciousness, as our focus on events transcend the act itself (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003).

### ***Hermeneutics***

The third major theoretical foundation of IPA is interpretation. Historically, hermeneutics was used as the philosophical basis for interpreting biblical texts in order to provide a framework within which the original intentions of an author might be uncovered (Smith, 2013). The German theologian, Schleiermacher (Smith et al, 2009), developed a process of grammatical and psychological interpretation to understand both the writer and the text, to reach the true meaning of the text. He stressed that the interpretations must be made available for the reader, along with the wider context in which the text was originally produced. Heidegger (Smith et al, 2009) used the term 'hermeneutic circle' to describe the continual interplay that takes place, as the researcher understands the whole text based on their understanding of each individual part of the text by reference to the whole. The meaning of the whole text or the individual parts of the text cannot be understood without

reference to the other. The researcher achieves this through moving position across the circle throughout the analytical process. The hermeneutic circle is therefore used in iterative analytic understanding of parts of the text, from what is unspoken, to a single word, to a paragraph, to an understanding of the whole text, to an understanding of the individual participant.

The double hermeneutic encapsulates that the researcher must be conscious of how their constructions of reality will shape and influence their interpretation of how the participant is trying to make sense of their experiences. It is therefore important for the researcher to be aware of their views of the world in the analysis and interpretation of the text (Smith and Osborn, 2007). As it is impossible to start without preconceptions, it is important that the researcher is clear how interpretations have been made, with the researcher being visible in the 'frame' of research as interested and involved rather than subjective and impartial (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

### ***Idiography***

The fourth major tenet of IPA is idiography with a focus on the particular rather than the general. This is in contrast to the nomothetic approach adopted by more traditional, positivist and post-positivist psychological research that aim to apply its findings to a wider population. IPA focuses on convergence and divergence within a participant group's experience of phenomena, requiring individual comparisons and valuing each case in its own right (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Each transcript is examined in detail as an entity in its own right, before careful generalisations are established in a narrative account including extracts from the individual participants (Smith et al, 2009; Smith and Osborn, 2007). Accordingly

participants are purposively recruited to achieve a homogenous sample for the research.

### **3.34 Rationale for selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

IPA was chosen because it is compatible with my research aim, of trying to understand the lived experiences of a group of young people in the PRU in regard to ecological factors of resilience, and how they try and make sense of their experiences. It is particularly concerned with what happens when the *'everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people'* (Smith et al, 2009, p1).

IPA is also compatible with my personal position, valuing the importance of enabling the participants to describe their own experiences and perspectives, in the belief that their reality is construed through their experiences and the meanings they give those experiences. It is hoped that through an interpretation of these experiences and their meanings, an understanding of how the participants see the world around them and how they use available resources in being resilient will be gained. It is acknowledged that as a researcher my own preconceptions and beliefs will affect my interpretation of the participants' accounts.

### **3.35 Limitations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

As with any methodological approach, IPA has some limitations.

- The first of these is the role of language; it assumes that participants have the necessary level of linguistic competence to describe their experience. It is recognised that young people with SEMHD have difficulties with language, and one must be sensitive to this in

interviews and in the analysis. As Willig (2008) points out, language therefore gives us constructs of reality.

- IPA risks being descriptive of themes rather than being analytical of them (Smith, 2010).
- The generation of too large a number of descriptive superordinate and subordinate themes with insufficient data extracts presented to support each theme, or a large number of short descriptive quotes in an attempt to demonstrate good frequency for a theme.
- Interview schedules which are too complex, and not allowing the participant to talk freely about what's important to them.

### **3.36 The ontological position**

Ontology is the nature of reality. I take a relativist position, believing that knowledge is a social reality, value-laden and it only comes to light through individual interpretation. Adopting a relativist stance means a belief that there is no single objective truth to be known, and emphasises the diversity of interpretations that can be applied to the world.

### **3.37 The epistemological position**

'Epistemology' is the philosophy of knowledge, the relationship between the researcher and the reality (Carson et al, 2001) and is concerned with what methods are used and why. This study was conceptualised within the interpretivist constructivist paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm is concerned with the internal reality of the participants. The aim is to gain a rich picture of the lives and experiences of individuals in order to interpret the meanings ascribed. Interpretivists hold that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation, hence there is no objective



knowledge that is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. All experiences are interpreted, and once human beings have interpreted a stimulus they assume their interpretation is real and the qualities they have ascribed are the actual qualities of objects. Responses to other situations and stimuli are then based on the attributes given to similar past experiences and interpretations. Individuals strive to attribute meaning to the natural and social world, as it is impossible to function in a meaningless world. Meanings are not static, but constantly being created, changed, modified and developed through interactions, and the individual's actions are simultaneously defined and confined by those meanings.

Interpretivists believe that reality is relative and multiple, meaning that individuals understand their reality based on their experiences, perceptions, and socially constructed interpretations. In its most extreme form, interpretive research contends that reality is constructed and that no universal truth exists. More broadly, interpretivism asserts that multiple truths exist, as determined by individuals' unique experiences and perspectives on the world. Accordingly, there can be more than one reality and multiple ways of interpreting such realities, depending on the researcher's perceptions and experiences. Hence, these multiple meanings are difficult to interpret as they depend on other systems for meanings. Furthermore, the knowledge generated from interpretations of others' meanings is in turn perceived through socially constructed and subjective interpretations, i.e. the views and perceptions of the researcher and of the reader (Carson et al 2001).

Interpretivists posit that reality cannot be separated from our knowledge of it, and therefore all research is subject to the researcher's values and beliefs.

The interpretivist researcher is empathetic, placing themselves in the shoes of the participant, trying to understand how they feel. The process is subjective and takes into account factors such as culture and environment. Any substantive theories or working hypothesis that are developed are idiographic, that is, they apply only to particular cases. The goal is to understand and interpret human behaviour rather than to generalise it.

### **3.38 Summary of position**

With my experience in forensic psychology, teaching and many years as an educational psychologist, as well as a mother of two children, my position lies within an interpretivist constructivist paradigm, with the belief that there are multiple constructed realities that generate different meanings for different individuals with interpretations being dependent on the researcher's lens (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). Accordingly, this study is therefore based on the premise that knowledge is conceptualised as a construction of reality from the perceptions of the individual, which is why in the study of resilience it is so important to hear the voice of the young person. The use of IPA offered an opportunity to develop an idiographic understanding of participants' experiences and what it means to them, within their particular social context and complex interactions.

## **3.4 Research Procedures**

An outline of the procedures is presented below.

### **3.41 Participants: Sampling and homogeneity**

The views of four purposefully selected young people in a PRU were collated via informal semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility for the young people to talk openly about their experiences and views of locally available

resources that may be accessed in the development of resilience. The interview transcripts were then analysed using IPA.

As IPA is informed by idiographic research, a small homogenous sample of four participants was recruited, to allow in-depth analysis and interpretation.

#### Homogenous group:

The participants were a homogenous group of participants as recommended by Smith (2010). They were all aged 14 years old, were in the same PRU, and were all Caucasian boys from the same town. They had all been permanently excluded from at least one secondary school for fighting, and had all been in the PRU for 2-3 terms.

#### Purposive sampling:

Purposive sampling was used in order to select participants for whom the topic has relevance and significance (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). The study was considered relevant and significant to the four participants as it is concerned with their views of local factors of resilience.

Twenty-six young people in the PRU or educated at home by PRU staff had completed the CYRM-28 Resilience Questionnaire (Ungar & the International Resilience Project, 2008) with staff in the PRU prior to the start of this study (Appendix 15). This questionnaire is designed to illicit scores for ecological factors of resilience, and gives a total score of resilience. It was decided to identify a homogenous sample from within the group who had undertaken the questionnaire as it showed this was an area of interest for them, and therefore relevant for them. In discussion and agreement with PRU staff four young people were identified to be invited to take part in this study, in order to make the sample as homogenous as possible. The four young people had a

range of total scores on the CYRM (Appendix 16), but it remains a purposive and homogenous sample.

It was agreed that if a young person were to decline taking part in an interview, or parental consent was withheld, then an invite would be extended to another pupil with a similar profile. However, all participants agreed to take part in the interviews with parental permission.

In addition, the PRU were asked to identify any young person who appeared not to be coping adequately with age-appropriate life tasks (and who may therefore find being part of the research too stressful) or who should not take part in the study for any reason.

### **3.42 Data Capture**

Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The interviews followed the general guidelines of qualitative semi-structured interviewing by using relatively open-ended and general questions and occasionally posing additional, more specific prompting questions to follow up particular areas of interest. The researcher tried to achieve a balance between being guided and being led. The interview questions were designed to capture the experiences and views of the participants about locally available resources that could be used for bolstering resilience, such as individual, relational, communal and cultural aspects. A short interview schedule that began with broad general questions was designed to use as prompt questions following recommendations from Smith et al (2009) to allow the participant to set the parameters of the topic (Appendix 14). This allowed the flexibility to be led by and fully explore the views of the participant as they were expressed, and to avoid bringing researcher bias into the study (Brocki

and Wearden, 2006). The interview schedule was discussed in supervision. The interviews were carried out in a quiet room in the PRU, feeling that this would be least anxiety provoking for the participants. The interviews did not have a time limit, and lasted between 40-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participant. After each interview the researcher made notes on her feelings and reactions to the interview, and any observations of the participant. Verbatim transcripts of the semi-structured interviews served as the raw data for the study.

### **3.43 Ethical Issues**

This research complies with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009), the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research (2010) and the University of Essex. Permission to undertake the research was gained from the Tavistock Clinic (Appendix 6), the Local Authority (Appendix 7 and 8), and the PRU in which the study took place.

### **3.44 Data**

All data collected whilst undertaking this research was held in accordance with the Local Authority's data protection policy and in line with the guidelines issued by the British Psychological Society. The data was stored in a secure, password-protected computer that only the researcher had access to. All four interviews were audio recorded, with the agreement of the participants, to enable detailed content analysis via IPA, and deleted after transcription. Participants were given the choice to refuse an audio recording of the interview.

This study presents information in such a way as to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Participants were informed of the systems for storing data and the anonymity of the research.

### **3.45 Information and consent**

All pupils and parents were provided with information sheets and consent forms for the research project, outlining the process of volunteer pupils completing a questionnaire on resilience (CYRM-28) with school staff, after which some pupils would be invited to take part in an individual interview to explore with them their views of what helps them be resilient (Appendices 11, 12 and 13). On the advice of the PRU Head Teacher the parents were given the chance to 'opt out' rather than give written permission, as this was the same system used in school for permission. School office staff accordingly made follow-up phone calls and texts after the letters were sent in order to parents to opt out if desired. Parents/carers were given the opportunity to meet with me for further clarification.

It was planned that if a participant were a Looked After Child then consent from the legal guardian would be sought (Appendix 10).

Pupils invited to participate in the interviews were given a full explanation of the research and informed verbally and on the Information Sheet that they can withdraw at any time. If the young people were willing to proceed an interview was arranged and verbal consent reconfirmed at the time of interview.

Participants were informed that their participation does not affect the service they will be offered in any way.

If a young person chose not to participate on the day they would have been given the option to participate on a different day, or to withdraw from the research completely, without any consequences.

The participants were asked if they agreed to the interviews being recorded, and later transcribed.

### **3.46 Duty of care**

There is recognition that any interview may have unintended consequences for participants. Arrangements were made in the PRU for immediate support over any issues that may arise and a follow up interview to be offered. Any concerns would then be passed on to those in a position to address them.

Any child protection issues arising in the interviews would have resulted in the termination of the interview and Local Authority Child Protection Procedures would have been followed.

### **3.47 Feasibility and Resource Utilisation**

The researcher gave small amount local shopping mall vouchers for recompense of time to the participants for taking part in this study. This is in accordance with the PRU's usual procedures for additional work and rewards.

### **3.48 Transcription**

The interviews were transcribed, verbatim, taking care to change names or replace anything that may have identified any individual, school or Local Authority with bracketed information, for instance, [name of school].

Each participant was given a pseudonym.

The researcher transcribed the interviews in an effort to hear the voice of the participant, be immersed in the data and allow maximum familiarity with the

texts. Each transcript was typed in landscape format with wide margins on either side for analysis of the text.

### **3.5 Data Analysis: Process used for the IPA**

The transcribed semi-structured interviews were analysed using IPA in the belief that the meanings an individual ascribes to events are of central concern but are only accessible through an interpretative process. The analysis followed processes described by Eatough, Smith & Shaw (2008), and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). The analysis was a dynamic and fluid process, moving backwards and forwards between the whole and the parts, throughout the analytical processes. The stages used are described below:

(i) The analysis began with a close interpretative reading of the first transcript, which required becoming immersed in the data, reading and re-reading it many times. It had been transcribed in landscape format, and using the left hand margin on the transcript I noted my initial thoughts and responses to the text, along with any comments I had recorded immediately after each interview had finished, such as body language, and tone of voice (example in Appendix 17). Different text formats are used in the margins (Appendix 18), for instance, 'normal text' recorded initial thoughts and observations, while '*text in italics*' indicated my reflections on the participant's feelings, or my feelings. These initial notes aim to capture details, which will aid the idiographic as well as reflecting the beginning of the interpretative analysis. Smith and Eatough (2007) highlight the involvement of the researcher at every phase, unable to not make reflections and judgements based on own our experiences and beliefs. These initial thoughts may be transitory or may be developed through further reading and deeper analysis.



(ii) Re-readings of the transcript then analysed and developed these initial thoughts and exploratory comments into emergent themes using psychological constructs and a higher level of abstraction, which were recorded in the right hand margin on the transcript (Appendix 19 shows the full transcript with analysis for Arron). The hermeneutic circle was fundamental in achieving understanding of the parts and the whole in the deeper analysis needed.

(iii) The third stage reduced the data by looking at the initial thoughts, comments and analysis, and noting the emergent themes that reflect and capture the idiographic and commonalities between meanings. When no new themes or analytical comments emerged from looking at the single text, the next texts were looked at in the same format. This process was carried out for each participant's text, and a table was made for each text (Appendix 20 Arron; Appendix 21 Jas, Appendix 22 Kaamil, Appendix 23 Ian).

(iv) Tables of the emergent themes were made for each participant and quotes put by the emergent themes to ensure clarity of thinking and demonstrate the process used (example in Appendix 24).

(v) The next stage involved establishing connections between emergent themes and grouping them together into clusters; each cluster was given a descriptive title, which was developed into a subordinate theme as the analysis of the texts continued, if it was robust enough to be common across the participants texts. This analytical process involved the processes of abstraction and subsumption, whilst moving between inductive and deductive positions. Reference back to analysed texts was a frequent part of the process, as part of the hermeneutic circle referred to earlier, for reference of

themes, similarities and differences. The researcher tried to remain sensitive to explanations given by the participants which may have challenged the thinking of the researcher, or which could have moved the research in a different direction to that expected. At the end of analysis of each participant's text, to ensure robustness of the process, quotes from each participant's transcript were collated under the subordinate themes. An example may be seen in Appendix 25, which shows the initial thinking on development of subordinate themes for Arron.

(v) The same process was used to group subordinate themes under overarching superordinate themes, whilst ensuring the iterative process of moving back and forth between the data to ensure it accurately captures what the participants had said (Appendix 26).

(vi) In order to check that there were sufficient weightings to the superordinate themes, the numbers of quotes from each participant that supported the subordinate and superordinate themes were counted (Appendix 27).

(vii) Once re-readings and reanalysis found that nothing new was emerging, the final version of the superordinate and subordinate themes had become clear (Appendix 28). Quotes from each participant were entered into a table under the subordinate and superordinate headings, and Appendix 29 shows the example of quotes from Arron under each heading.

(iix) At the end of this process 3 colleagues in the Educational Psychology Service reviewed and audited the themes and interpretive claims, to ensure the analytical process was clear and made sense, and that this process was sufficiently evidenced (see Appendix 30 for example of initial feedback). The

EP colleagues were invited to comment on the robustness of the analysis, and to consider whether there were any themes or analysis which stood out to them which had been overlooked by the researcher.

(ix) The table of superordinate themes was then developed into an analytical narrative account, an interpretative commentary by the researcher, supported by verbatim extracts from each participant. This provides a clear and coherent interpretative account of the participants' meanings, allowing nuances of meaning while providing a framework that allows understanding of their views and experiences of ecological factors of resilience.

### **3.6 Validity And Reliability**

The transcribed interviews are available for reanalysis if required (see discs) and the process used has been made explicit to allow for checks of reliability. The researcher is aware that in interview situations a degree of co-construction of data occurs. This was managed through use of a self-reflexive diary and discussions with EP colleagues during the IPA process.

Yardley (2008) proposes four principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research, each of which the researcher has addressed in using IPA, as discussed below:

#### 1. Sensitivity to context

IPA demonstrates sensitivity to context through focusing on the idiographic and the particular. Therefore, when analysing the data, the researcher tried to demonstrate sensitivity to the data, ensuring the participant voice remained strong, and their experiences were analysed and interpreted in a justifiable and evidenced way. The researcher has ensured interpretative claims are grounded in the original data, to enable the reader to check interpretations.

## 2. Commitment and rigour

Commitment was demonstrated through trying to ensure the participants felt at ease and knew that they were being listened to. The quality of the interview data shows this commitment. Rigour is demonstrated through the thorough and systematic analysis, with an idiographic perspective as well as being interpretative.

## 3. Transparency and coherence

Transparency can be measured by the extent to which each stage of the research process has been described. In order to increase the transparency of this research, an audit trail was produced at each stage of the analysis, as recommended by Smith & Eatough (2012) so that the themes generated can be tracked back to the original data, and the principles of IPA adhered to. Regular supervision with a university supervisor and with my EP colleagues was held to ensure rigour and transparency. Coherence is demonstrated in the write-up of the thesis.

## 4. Impact and importance

Yardley (2008) suggests that the real validity of a piece of research is whether it has something important, interesting or useful to say. This study offers a unique and rich exploration of four young people's views and experiences about locally available resources for resilience, and the powerful impact these have had on their development.

### **3.61 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity describes how a researcher's point of view may change during the course of the research, and how the researcher may influence the study. This research has been guided by the qualitative paradigm of IPA, which fits my

epistemological position. I am guided both by an interpretivist constructivist epistemology, whereby I acknowledge that an individual's understanding of the world results from social processes and interactions with people, and is based on meanings they assign to their world. Therefore, I am aware that my interests in these approaches may influence how I interpret the data, and I will be open to and aware of this possibility in the analysis.

I am cognisant of my initial thinking and knowledge of the population at the PRU may influence my interpretations of the data if I do not remain cognisant of the possibility and try to bracket these assumptions as much as possible before and during analysis. My beliefs that may influence my analysis and interpretation include:

- (i) that nationally and locally there is a need to improve outcomes for this population, for instance, the young people leaving the PRU have poor outcomes, such as a greater likelihood of being NEET, and needing the local mental health services;
- (ii) the generally low social economic status of the families whose children attend the PRU, and the importance of literature such as 'Bridges Out of Poverty' (Payne et al, 2006);
- (iii) the shared narrative within the LA about poor quality of parenting and attachment,
- (iv) the quality of support available to families in need.
- (v) the participants in this study are likely to have differing levels of resiliency due to the multiple constructions of meaning and knowledge they have as a result of different experiences

throughout their life leading to differing perspectives. Their experiences form their perceptions of reality.

- (vi) I therefore feel it is vital to listen to the young people's descriptions of their experiences and views, in order to get a rich contextual picture, to help develop an understanding of factors affecting their resilience.

My initial beliefs were compared to my developing beliefs and understanding as the research continued and at the end of the research. I kept a reflexive diary throughout the process, which proved cathartic as well as influential in the trustworthiness of my thinking.

### **3.7 Relevance of this research to Educational Psychology (EP) practice:**

This piece of research is important in providing a rich picture of four young people in a PRU about their experiences and perceptions of local resources that could be used in developing resilience. It is hoped that it demonstrates the importance of using an interpretative constructivist approach to research that Educational Psychologists can undertake in order to understand phenomena better. EPs are well placed to undertake similar research with young people, across a range of research areas, but in particular, when thinking of mental health and resilience of young people in schools.

### **3.8 The Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because:

1. Listening to the views and perceptions of children and young people will enrich our understanding of their lives and what their experiences are of their locally available resources that are important in the development of resilience (Ungar, 2005; Boyden and Mann, 2005).

2. It will inform future resilience studies as an example of an interpretivist constructivist approach to an ecological and multi-layered model of resilience.
3. It highlights the importance of EPs seeking and listening to the views of young people when seeking to understand a phenomenon.
4. It highlights the effectiveness of using IPA to develop our understanding of participants' experiences.

## Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter presents a rich picture of the experiences and views of four young people about local factors of resilience. It presents the superordinate and subordinate themes that were drawn out through the interpretative process of analysis, based on the process described in Chapter 3. This captures the participant's shared meaning and understanding, but remains idiographic with nuances presented. Langdridge (2007) recommends including short biographies of each participant in order to show homogeneity and further background information. These are presented below, in order to preserve the idiographic whilst presenting interpretative themes:

### 4.1 Short biographies of the participants

The four participants have been given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. They are all boys in Year 9, and have been at the PRU for 2-3 terms. All were permanently excluded for fighting.

#### Arron

Arron, is 14 years old, and in Year 9. He has been in the PRU for 4 months. He has attended 1 previous mainstream secondary school, and was permanently excluded for fighting.

Before the tape began, Arron began telling me about his family. He lives with his mum, as his parents are divorced, and his step-father started dating his mum when he was about 8 years old, and moved in when he was about 9 years old. He tried to tell Arron what to do all the time. He told me his family, including his mum and dad, and his aunts and uncles, 'sort things out' by fighting, and they all hit each other, 'all of the time'. He said he would hit anyone in his family, and once he hit his uncle and had to run away from him



before he got 'battered'. He told me he has been arrested 'loads of times'.

His younger brother has learning disabilities, and attends a specialist educational provision.

After the interview the SENCO in the PRU told me his previous school had applied for a statutory assessment of his special educational needs because of his EBD, but it was turned down. His views on life suggest previous negative experiences. He is finding it hard to manage in the PRU, and often develops an exaggerated London rapper/gangster type accent when he is talking.

Arron was very open in sharing his views and experiences. He appeared to have difficulty separating fantasy from reality at times, and gave me the impression that he would benefit from talking to a counsellor on a regular basis.

He lives in an area of high deprivation on a well-known estate.

### Ian

Ian is in Year 9, but has been put up a year into Year 10 classes in the PRU to stretch his learning. He has been permanently excluded from 1 mainstream secondary school. He was reintegrated into another mainstream secondary school but was almost immediately asked to leave following challenging behaviour and aggression towards peers and staff. He is in the process of having 'trials' at another secondary school, but has been in the PRU for several months as he keeps 'failing' his trials. The school have given him one 'last chance' and he is attending part-time with a behavioural contract, with a plan in place to increase to full time if he can adhere to the

contract. He hopes to be full-time in this school in September.

He does not have a statement of special educational need. A recent CAMHS report noted 'features of ASD' but did not feel he met the criteria for a diagnosis. He has difficulty with conforming to school rules about uniform; he doesn't like what he sees as confrontation with teachers so swears at them and walks out. He has a history of very violent behaviour. He recently threatened another boy's mother, and consequently there was a big fight with knives, and police involvement. He was permanently excluded for a serious assault, and drug use.

He was happy to talk, and spoke honestly about his experiences and views. His interpersonal skills were good in this situation, but the PRU report he seems to get social situations wrong a lot of the time. In the interview it was evident that friendships are very important to him, but are also an area of difficulty and anxiety for him. The PRU report he is quite rigid in his perceptions and thinking. He sees himself as different to other young people, and tends to be black or white with his views of people.

He seems to have periods of depression from what he told me in the interview, and school told me his mood can vary daily.

He lives with both parents and older brother at home. The family are engaged with Multi Systemic Therapy. He lives on an estate in a more affluent neighbourhood.

### Jas

Jas is in Year 9, and has been at the PRU for 4 months.

He was initially very anxious at the start of our meeting, but relaxed and

became very open about his experiences and his perceptions. Once the tape was off he talked a lot more about some of the topics he had raised in the interview – especially about his father. Jas' father went to prison for violence shortly after Jas was born, and came out when he was 7 years old. His parents then separated, and dad went to live in another part of the country, where he now has another family. His father was only out for a couple of years before once again being convicted for violent crimes, and imprisoned for 5 years. He was being released a week after our interview, just in time to take Jas to court for his recent string of offences.

Jas has had a lot of police involvement and his mother has said he has to go and live with his father and stepmother. Jas has a younger brother and is at times a carer for him. He has recently lost his uncle and grandfather who were both important to him.

Jas is dyslexic, and found school very hard; he told me he tried to cover up that he couldn't read or write by being naughty. He sees himself as a failure, and with no future. It seems likely his learning needs were not identified or addressed in school.

He lives in an area of high deprivation on a well-known estate.

### Kaamil

Kaamil is in Year 9, and has been permanently excluded from 3 mainstream secondary schools for fighting. He has a recent diagnosis of ADHD, and the PRU are applying for a statutory assessment of special educational need. He has made little progress in the PRU either academically or on the Boxall Profile, but he is attending regularly, and is not in significant amounts of

trouble although staff report that he remains unpredictable in his relationships with peers and adults.

Kaamil is likely to remain in the PRU, as he did not want to transfer to another school. He wants to go to college and be a digger driver.

Kaamil agreed to be interviewed, and answered questions, but was less forthcoming than the others. He may have responded better to meeting on successive occasions.

He has a twin brother and an older brother, both of whom have remained in mainstream secondary. Kaamil's parents are separated, but his father is often in the family house so he has a lot of contact with him.

He lives in an area of high deprivation.

#### **4.2 Superordinate themes and subordinate themes**

Interpretative analysis identified patterns and commonalities in the participants' experiences and perceptions, with four superordinate themes and eight subordinate themes identified. Each of the themes is now presented in detail as an interpretative narrative, with clear illustrations from each transcript provided. The participants gave rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences, and quotes are given which epitomise the single theme under consideration. Although the themes are discrete from each other, there are times when there is some interweaving between them. Furthermore, significant nuances are highlighted, to retain the idiographic and retain allegiance to the individual's accounts. The themes remain grounded in what the participants have said, but with levels of interpretation to bring out meaning.

The table below shows the four superordinate themes that were identified, with their associated subordinate themes.

Table 4: Superordinate Themes and Subordinate Themes

<b>Superordinate theme</b>	<b>Subordinate themes</b>
<u>Transition of self</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identity Construction</li> <li>- Future Self</li> </ul>
<u>Feeling unsafe</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Danger</li> </ul>
<u>Surviving in a dangerous world</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Criminality</li> <li>- Assertion through power and control</li> </ul>
<u>External influences on the self</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family Relationships</li> <li>- School and learning</li> <li>- Community Influences</li> </ul>

Each superordinate theme and its associate subordinate themes will now be presented.

#### **4.3 Superordinate Theme 1: Transition of Self**

The first superordinate theme that emerged from the interpretative analysis of the transcripts is 'Transition of Self'. At an initial surface level analysis, there are two distinct reasons why the 'Transition of Self' is so relevant to all four participants. Firstly, they are adolescents, which is in itself a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Secondly, by definition of being in a PRU, all four young people are in being held in transition, between the school they left and their next placement. However, deeper analysis suggests, in addition to these explanations, the participants had perceived permanent

exclusion as being excluded from their school peer group, and from wider society. The rejection by school, their biggest social influence, and the associated loss of identification and belonging, has resulted in all the participants experiencing painful feelings of wanting to belong and being rejected. The result is a strong identification with the PRU and projection of the unbearable feelings onto their local community, resulting in the rejection of the usual social support systems provided there. This necessitates a change of self-construct. This superordinate theme will now be further explored through analytical presentation of the two subordinate themes, 'Identity Construction' and 'Future self'.

#### **4.31 Subordinate theme: Identity construction**

The impact of the loss of being part of a major peer group has resulted in a loss of self-identity, and a need to generate a new identity. As a result the participants appear to have withdrawn from mainstream society, and appear defended in their position. This is particularly true for Ian, who throughout his interview reiterated feelings of not belonging, and identifying so strongly with the PRU that it has made it hard for him to form a membership of other groupings, making transition into another school hard, as his description of the transition in and out of two subsequent schools illustrates:

Ian: *"Well, I was at [name of first school], and then I got thrown out, came here, went back to [name of second school], came back here, and then on and off [PRU] and [name of second school] for a while"* (line 25-29)

For Ian this reflects and exacerbates his feelings of being different and not belonging. He expresses feelings of isolation from his family and local community, having been rejected by both and equally rejecting of both.

Throughout his interview he expressed a dichotomy about whether he wanted to rebel or conform, as a response to the pain of feeling isolated, and of being in a situation which is at odds with his internal schema of being successful and part of society. As a result he has constructed a self-identity of pathology, as illustrated in his quotes below:

Ian ... *"and they don't usually have troubled students"* (line 53-54) reflecting how he views himself as troubled, and different in some way from his peers, and outside of the usual social groups. He is often ambivalent about feeling forced outside of mainstream society, and frequently cannot tolerate these feelings as he tells me about them. He moves between pathologising himself and revelling in the picture he creates.

Ian ... *"All the other students are really well behaved... they weren't used to having anyone like me."* (line 88-90) which suggests that he worries that there is 'something wrong with him'. He later says:

Ian ... *"cos family, my family are really nice, like, so....they have extremely different outlooks,"* (line 259-261), again worrying that he is by contrast different and not 'nice', that there is something wrong with him. His descriptions suggest that he sees himself as removed from and different from mainstream society, where his 'nice' family belongs. The dichotomy this arises in him is to some extent eased by an analogy with illness, that there is something wrong with him that will get better again. This reflects his desire to return to the mainstream society, as illustrated in his talking about how he keeps failing his trials at his latest secondary school:

Ian ... *"and then progressively I'm getting better and better until I can stay there"* (line 65-67). The use of the language "I'm getting better and better"

reinforces the idea of something wrong with him, like an illness. Whilst the analogy of being unwell helps him tolerate uncomfortable feelings associated with rejection from school, peers and family, it appears to also make him feel powerless to change, reinforcing his failure in adapting to mainstream school life, and limiting his effective construction of an identity he is comfortable with. Ian presents as a young man whose self-identity is confused. He described the influence of his external environment of alcohol, drugs and fighting, but he is also keen to give me an idealistic image of himself:

Ian... *"I love camping, love camping, I don't know why, camping's just great...a can of lager, maybe do some fishing....it's quite fun. Ermm,* which he reiterates with: ... *"Yes camping is fun, like you find a nice quiet place, where no one is, it's just the best" ...*(lines 227-278)

DH... *"Do you feel different when you are somewhere peaceful like that?"*

Ian... *"Yeah, calmer. Cos my friend [name] got this bag with speakers on it, so we play music through that, nice chilled music to listen to, do some fishing, something to do for a time, maybe kick a ball round or something."* (lines 296-306).

Ian's descriptions are reflective of his conflicting schemas of the world, and represent his polarised view of the world (seen also in his description of 'good' crowd and 'bad' crowd quote), but he appears to be developing healthier coping skills through meeting new friends and striving to be successful in returning to mainstream schools and friendships.

A similar difficulty with identity construction is evident in Arron's account. His descriptions of his experiences also suggest feelings of rejection and not belonging, with impacts on self-perception and identity, and feelings of low



self-worth. He appears to have no robustness in his view of self. He describes being seen by others as a bully, but cannot understand why others would see him as a bully. One possible reason for this is that he is so scared of the world he cannot understand how he could be perceived as a bully. There are many examples of this through his interview, and the most painful are those that relate to his siblings or family. He had just explained to me that his brother has a learning disability and goes to a special school, but that he cannot help look after him because his mum and his brother think that he is doing something horrible:

Arron ... *"My mum, if I start doing it, yeah, he cries, and say that I'm doing something to him, I take the mickey out of him, so my mum tells me off, so I don't do anything with him"* (line 73-79). He looked upset while he was telling me this. Arron seemed sad about rejection from his family, and resigned to rejection from schools and groups of others, and this is represented through his low self-esteem and loss of identification. He remains powerless to develop a sense of self that is more in keeping with how he would like to be perceived. He has a very negative view of himself:

Arron ... *"It's just what I do.....it's all crap."* (line 120). Arron has feelings of life being out of his control, and appears to wonder how it has all gone so wrong for him, and unfair life is. To balance this he has developed idealised fantasies of how life could be:

Arron... *"Yeah, I believe that everything in life should be free."*

DH... *"Free in what way?"*

Arron... *"Don't have to work or ...just be free. "*

DH... *"Ok, just have all your time free?"*

Arron... *“Everything will be free. Everything”* (line 30-38).

Arron’s view that everything in life should be free and, *“like there wouldn’t be gangs of like you gave more stuff to us, like little children”* (line 297-298) is reminiscent of abuse victims who are often bought gifts to make up for the abuse.

Arron’s account of his experiences appears to suggest he has significant issues in his relationships with his mother and in particular his step-father, with his feelings of there also being no point in being good at home possibly reflecting an abusive relationship. Whilst this will be considered in the superordinate theme ‘External influences’ and the subordinate theme ‘Family Relationships’, it is relevant to mention here because an interpretation of his difficulty with his identity construction is that it may have been challenged at a crucial developmental point by the abusive behaviour of his stepfather toward him. It is likely he felt unprotected by his mother from his stepfather. A secure base with his mother as the primary caretaker would have given Arron a sense of himself as ‘good’ and valued, but he may not have felt protected by her once his stepfather moved in when he was 8 years old. Accordingly, Arron’s emotional development and construction of himself has stopped at a much younger age, and he refers to himself as a younger child:

... *“like there wouldn’t be gangs of, like you gave more stuff to us, like little children..”* (line 299-300)

... *“like little little kids, they don’t mind it. When I was little I didn’t mind youth clubs”* (line 309-310)

and ... *“That’s why younger children, my generation, are always angry, naughty, ‘cos the only thing we can do outside, to have fun, is to get into trouble.”* (line 333-336)

He views life as being unfair, and scary (see the superordinate theme ‘Feeling Unsafe’), suggesting that he needs to remain ‘*little*’ in some way – his view of himself is one of a small, unprotected child who needs someone to rescue him, and is unable to construct a positive self-identity. He has little sense of self, which may exacerbate the feelings of hopelessness and danger that he experiences.

Loss of identity and the need to construct a new self was central for Jas in his experiences and how he makes sense of his world. There are several elements to his loss of identity, and difficulty with taking on a new identity. Jas described a loss of self-identity through difficulties with learning, which has impacted on his planned future self (see subordinate theme ‘Future Self’), and which resulted indirectly to his permanent exclusion from school. This interpretation of difficulties with identity construction is also largely related to him being told he is going to live with his father who has just come out of prison for extreme violence. Jas’ mum told him she has had enough of his criminal behaviour and now Jas appears to feel confronted with having no option other than following in his father’s footsteps. Thus he feels rejected from his secondary school, his peer group, and from his family. Jas appears scared of whether he is capable of the same of violence as his father, and the loss of his self-concept has now been replaced with a fear of who he could become. He father is well known locally for violent crimes, and Jas

expressed feelings of lack of control over what he could do, for instance, he said he did not want to go into London with youth workers because:

Jas... “ *you have to behave and stuff*” (line 209-210) indicating he may be scared of not being able to behave, and worried about what he might become. As the interview progressed, it became clear why Jas may be afraid of what he may become, and why the theme of transition of self is so central to him at this time (see superordinate theme ‘Surviving in a Dangerous World’ for more on his involvement with police). Jas has experienced the loss of his idealised future self, the death of his uncle and grandfather, and is now confronted with losing his mother and his younger brother. He is scared of who he may ‘have’ to become, and appears to feel without other opportunities to develop an alternative self-concept.

The transition of self, and in particular the construction of identity, was epitomised through the participants’ idealisation of childhood, as a longing for a return to feelings of acceptance and belonging. This idealisation may be representative of being guarded against the memory of remembering negative experiences when they were children, and as a defence against the pain of the present.

Ian ... “*Primary school was pretty fine, never really naughty, at all. I was like really teacher’s pet!*” (line 108-110), and “*Yeah. I mean, my older brother, he’s sort of the model student. He’s just finished year 11 and that, and done very well, and all that crap, and he’s...he’s sort of the star... star child and all that in mum and dad’s eyes, and sort of me stuck in [name of PRU] doing half days...being a pain. Yeah*” (line 183-189), and “*I play guitar and drums and a little bit of piano.*” (line 215-216) These quotes suggest that Ian has a wish to

maintain the idealised self; he had that role in primary school, and now his older brother does. He wants to maintain part of it by continuing to want to play the piano. His use of language, *'being a pain'*, is a reference to an illness, pathologising himself, but the language also demonstrates how painful this is for him. The language is hesitant and repetitive, *'he's ...he's sort of the star...star child'* so that makes him the complete opposite in his eyes, *'a pain'*. It seems as though he may hold rather polarised views – things are either good or bad, and he is struggling with where he fits now, as he sees it, school and society have rejected him.

Arron also showed idealisation of his early childhood, before his stepfather came along (see the subordinate theme 'Family Relationships'), including when he was at primary school before things went wrong for him:

Arron... *"I was good at primary school, yeah? I went [name of school] as well. I was good, good till year 5, then it all went wiggly in year 6. In year 6 I was perfectly behaved, then I got blamed for something I didn't do..... So I still was annoyed and I was blamed and excluded for a couple of days...by then you're in trouble. So I just thought, I'm going to be really naughty now."*

DH... *"So you made a decision to be naughty?"*

Arron... *"Yeah that's the decision I made, I thought what's the point in being good, I'm getting really pissed off...."* (line 393-410). Arron moved in and out of a strong accent while he spoke, reflecting his need to take on another identity or persona to protect himself. The fact that he has chosen a 'gangster' type accent suggests he feels he needs to be seen by others as being powerful. His words, *'what's the point in being good'* suggest that he

felt adults did not notice if he was good or not, and he is protecting himself from that pain.

Jas on the other hand, appears to have had the hardest and most sudden loss of identity, and consequential difficulty in constructing a new concept of self. He has a sense of who he used to be, again idealising his childhood, but no current self-concept and a lost planned future self. The quote below illustrates how he idealised his childhood:

Jas... *"I live in XPart-of-Town, like, in a little close, but like, that's like where my mum wanted me to grow up, 'cos like there's loads of kids that live on that road and that, and when I was little you could just go out and play and stuff, 'cos like there was a little park like right opposite the house"* (line 156-165).

This quote shows the idealised childhood that Jas remembers, despite this being one of the most impoverished areas of the region, with a high crime rate. But he has now lost his idealised childhood, it is firmly behind him:

Jas... *"I used to be good at like BMXing, scooter and stuff, but I don't do that no more."* (line 232).

Jas appears to be struggling with a lot of anxious and sad feelings about his life and his future, feelings that have been exaggerated by his loss of previous self-identity, and his fears of a future one.

Kaamil was the quietest participant, and almost shy in the interviews, and it was apparent that his use of language and level of emotional literacy may have made the interview hard for him.

DH... *"What do you think your strengths and skills are?"*

Kaamil... *"Don't know"*

DH... *"Not sure? Ok. What's the best thing that has ever happened to you?"*

*Kaamil... "I don't know. Anything" (line 183-187).*

He spoke of permanent exclusion from three schools for fighting, and this has become his identity. His defensive attitude in the interview represents how he is hyper vigilant against attack, and possibly defended against talking about difficult feelings.

#### **4.32 Subordinate theme: Future Self**

The second subordinate theme under the superordinate theme 'Transition of Self' is 'Future Self'. Holding a future self in mind means being able to bear the thought of transition of self from the present, the ability to imagine oneself in the future, and to have the aspirations and motivation to attain it, and where necessary, the ability to access ecological factors of resilience. The participants varied in their ability to hold a future self in mind but all seemed to express a sadness about their future self, although to differing degrees; Jas and Arron struggled to see any positives in their futures, while Ian and Kaamil are able to imagine a self that is different from the present but perhaps not what they had envisaged.

Jas is preoccupied with his loss of his future self, and this has impacted hugely on his current identity construction. He had a sense of who he was, idealising his childhood, with a sense of who he wanted to be. The first blow to his imagined self and current view of himself is his dyslexia. He describes how it impacted on his schooling, peer relationships, self-esteem and took away his aspirations. Jas spoke at length of the loss of his idealised future self, in the army, after '*failing*' army cadets:

Jas ... "*Ermm... I used to want to be in the army, but I don't really want to do that no more.*"

DH ... *"Ok. What made you change your mind?"*

Jas ... *"Erm...well I went in cadets and that, and erm....I was passing all the like physical stuff, and it was like all the reading and writing stuff that I didn't pass. It's like I kept failing 'n that 'cos I'm dyslexic and that, and then, I just quit it 'cos I realised you have to do it in the army, so I just quit it, I couldn't do it."* (line 300-310). He is experiencing grief and mourning for his envisioned future self. This is particularly poignant as he is grieving for his uncle and granddad, both of whom died recently, and often when a loved one dies, part of the grieving process is adjusting to the difference in who you are as a result of their loss. This loss of self-identity and of future self means that Jas currently sees no hope for his future and cannot envision a future self other than the same one as his father:

Jas ... *"I don't think I can do much"* (line 378) suggesting feelings of a lack of ability to do anything, but also an inability to prevent himself taking after his father. Unfortunately he has been increasingly involved in criminal activities (see 'Criminality' subordinate theme) and as a result his mum has told him he will go and live with his father, who has just come out of prison for violence; it seems Jas now fears he may become like his father. This causes dissonance in him because it is the opposite life style to the order and structure of the army.

The nearest Jas gets to imagining the transition to a different, positive future self, is when he tells me how good he is at looking after his younger brother, and the happiest time of his life was when his brother was born:

Jas... *"And I'm good with my like little brother ..... Just play with him and that, put him to bed, get his dinner sometimes."* (line 236-246) which is really



hard as he may soon be separated from him. This is the final loss of the only part of a positive self he had described.

Ian can picture a future self, but he continues to have a dichotomy of not being sure if he wants to conform or be rebellious. He is experiencing dissonance from being seen as being different from his family, who reflect his internal schema for the world, and excitement of identifying with other groupings. This causes him sadness at points but also allows him to envisage both a more rebellious future self and a more traditional view of himself as having embraced his family's values:

DH... *"So what are your aspirations for life?"*

Ian... *"Aspirations?"*

DH... *"Hmm, your hopes and dreams...."*

Ian... *"(laughs) I don't really know: a career in music. I play guitar and drums and a little bit of piano."*

DH... *"Ok, so you are musical?"*

Ian... *"Mmm, self-taught.... by friends, a little bit from school, a little bit from the internet. Mainly practising by myself." (line 211-216)*

I felt that a career in music is how he would like himself to be seen – playing the drums and guitar are seen as rebellious perhaps, compared with the piano, which he had learnt when he was younger, and is more conformist. The '*little bit of piano*' is like the little bit of the old 'good I', the idealised 'I' that is left.

He was keen to tell me his aspirations did not include having children:

Ian. ... *"Babies to me are potatoes with arms and legs." (line 225)*

This may reflect his concerns about his difficulties with understanding people. But, true to the dichotomy of self he is experiencing, he immediately presented me with a very traditional view of his future:

Ian... *"a decent amount of money and I think I'd probably invest the lot in a bank, rather than spend it...on a nice house, even if I did have a lot of money, I'd get a bungalow or something, something small"* (line 238-243).

He spoke a lot about not being popular, and 'getting in with the wrong crowd' in year 8, and he spoke about new friends:

Ian... *"I hang around with a different crowd of friends than I did 6, 7 months ago, the bad influence, they're like nicer people now"* (line 195-197) and

Ian... *"we get on so well it's insane"* (line 328-336)

And his desire to make a successful move to secondary school

Ian... *"I'm hoping to go there [mainstream secondary] full-time in September"*. (line 357). He is beginning to be able to see a future for himself, with money, a house, a career in music, and it sounds as though there have been recent developments in developing his sense of self, and this transition to a new self appears to be positive, although he still says there have not been any happy times in his life:

Ian... *"(Pause. Sounds sad) I don't think there really has been"* (line 328).

Arron is overwhelmed by life, finding it scary and dangerous. He feels life is unfair to him and he is not protected from it. He cannot see a future for himself, because he is so overwhelmed by the dangers he perceives around him:

DH... *"Can you tell me about a time you remember as being particularly tough for you? Difficult to get through?"*

Arron... *"It's always difficult! No its all right ... (pause) ...there's always stuff going on all the time. I'm all right, I just get on with it. Sometimes it's hard to get on with my step-dad, and that."* (line 104-108)

He found this hard to admit, and immediately wanted to reassure me, and himself, that he is all right. Yet he is isolated, and afraid to seek help from others. He appears not to have found any ecological factors of resilience helpful. He seems to internalise his problems, not trusting anyone enough to seek help or support:

DH... *"Do you know of anywhere or anyone you could go to help you manage when things are tough for you?"*

Arron... *"No."* (line 131-134)

He meets the profile of a child who has experienced trauma in his childhood.

He sees no hope and has no aspirations:

DH... *"What are your aspirations in life? (pause) Like, what do you want from life, where do you want to live, what kind of job do you see yourself doing?"*

Arron... *"Shit!"*

DH... *"What do you mean?"*

Arron... *"Yeah. Gunge. The best job I'm probably going to get is like bin man or something"* (line 385-392). This seems to communicate to us that his life is 'shit', repugnant and worthless. Aspirations are impossible without a sense of worth and factors of resilience being available. Arron is overwhelmed by the dangers he sees around him. This will be explored more in the superordinate theme 'Feeling Unsafe'.

Kaamil, despite many risk factors to resilience, such as being diagnosed with ADHD, having a separated family, and being permanently excluded from

three mainstream secondary schools for fighting, has a future self clearly in mind. He has a clear plan of how he is to achieve his aspirations, as the following extract shows:

Kaamil... *"A job with a trade, something like that, building or something."*  
(line 103-104)

DH. *"How do you get a trade like that?"*

Kaamil ... *"Don't know. Apprenticeships."* (line 111)

DH... *"Ok, so what's your plan after [name of PRU]?"*

Kaamil ... *"Go to college after."* (line 113)

DH... *"Ok, will you go to another school first?"*

Kaamil... *"I think I might be staying here, I don't know. I know I'm going to go college."* (line 115-116)

DH... *"What else do you have dreams for in your life?"*

Kaamil... *"To become rich. Yeah."* (line 119)

DH... *"What would you do with your money?"*

Kaamil ... *"Invest it. Don't know, anything."* (line 121)

Kaamil's access to resources that bolster resilience means he has a positive future self, defined by his aspirations and plans.

#### **4.4. Superordinate Theme 2: Feeling unsafe**

Local communities are recognised as a factor of resilience for young people. However, all four young people spoke about the dangers of the local area, and how they feel unsafe. This superordinate theme of 'Feeling Unsafe' gives an indication of how the participants, rather than feeling their community is a source of strength and protection for them, feel that these local resources are not only unavailable to them, but a risk to them. They all describe

experiences and perceptions of feeling unsafe, and at times afraid. The feeling of being unsafe is palpable in the account by Arron, and strongly evident in all of the participants' accounts. Feelings of being unsafe are related to their community, their schools, peers and families.

There is one subordinate theme, which is 'Danger', as this clarifies how the participants feel unsafe through perceiving events around them as dangerous.

#### **4.41 Subordinate theme: Danger**

The theme of 'Danger' was raised throughout the interviews. Arron was the most outspoken about the local area and community. He sees the local area as very dangerous and a threatening place to be in, which represents just how scared he is of life, and how threatened he feels. An interpretative hypothesis is that Arron has suffered trauma in his childhood, possibly an abusive step-father from his account, and as a result, perceives the world as a dangerous place. He does not feel safe or protected. His accounts appear to be at times based on paranoia and fantasy rather than reality.

DH... *"What are the risks of growing up here in [name of town]?"*

Arron... *"There's dangers all around us in [name of town] ..... they getting more houses so more people's going to move in, to a small area, and you never know what's coming, there could be idiots or stuff like that..."* (line 139-162)

DH... *"Hmm. You said there are dangers in [local area]?"*

Arron... *"Yeah there's loads of drugs around."*

DH... *"How do you manage to avoid that?"*

*Arron... "Like older people they don't see it, everyone thinks [local area]'s a nice place but like there's loads of places that are no-go areas in [name of town]. Like people get really out of it. Like there's loads of fighting there's always fights." (line 166-175) ... "Always fights everywhere.....like in town everyone thinks it's a good place, but there are areas where some of us just can't go 'cos there's fights and that." (line 185-189)*

These words may represent a feeling of being unsafe and being in danger at home, with fights also happening there. He appears overwhelmed with the dangers of the world around him, perceptions that seemed to influence all of his cognitive processing. The quotes below are chosen to illustrate the extent of his fears, which quickly escalate from local area 'facts' to worries about killers being in the area:

*Arron... Always fights everywhere (line 185).... But there's plenty of knives and loads of other stuff .... And there probably is guns, like people can walk up to me and kill me with a gun (line 194-195)*

*Arron... Yeah! And you know that kid yeah, those two kids yeah that put that boy in front of the train? You know they tortured him and put him in front of a train {Jamie Bulger} ..... "Well now he's back out, yeah, they should put him in for life, yeah? They did pretty much better nasty stuff to that kid yeah, and I won't lie or nothing, I was one or two, I understand what they done, they did to him right, better nasty stuff to him, but I ain't going to let someone like that back out, 'cos they're just going to do it again, 'cos they're sick in the head, and now he's back out, and even if they're alone, they're probably just going to move out here, because they're gone, away from London" (line 297-214).*

Arron's speech becomes more disorganised as he begins to show how

fragmented and nonsensical the world is to him. As mentioned earlier, Arron had a recurring theme of being a younger child who needs protection, and his recurring dominant theme of being in danger and feeling unsafe included feeling unprotected by parents and the police:

Arron... *"They arrested me, took me home, gave me warnings, and then like, they use brute force right. No-one would have run, if they had just said, 'come on [name], come with me', I've run away from police before like, but they still catch me, the old bill, and they throw you to the floor. One time my friend got arrested, I was there, right, and he was thrown to the floor, so his face hit the floor, and his nose started bleeding, and when they put the hand cuffs on his hands went purple straight away, where the hand cuffs were too tight. They wouldn't loosen them, they said they could come undone."* (line 359-373).

There are analogies between the police and his parents, and the Police Support Officers (PSOs) and his step-father:

Arron... *"They instantly think you've done something. The PSOs they think they're big. But they haven't the power to arrest you. Only real police have the power to arrest you, yeah? Or like, ermm, specials and stuff, it was TV, they have power to arrest you. PSOs don't have police cars, they're only on bikes or walking, they try and arrest you and act all big, but I guarantee you, if they don't have that badge they can't do fuck all."* (line 421-431).

Arron's narrative suggests he has experienced on-going trauma, possibly physical abuse by his step-father, whom he views as a 'PSO' rather than a real 'police officer', a figure who wants to be in authority, and around whom Arron feels unsafe; this experience influences his perceptions of the world

and community around him, so he perceives danger to be present everywhere:

Arron... *"like [name of] Park everyone knows what happens there in the daytime, yeah? There's loads of fun there, everyone's having a fun day out yeah?"..... "But no-one knows what happens at nights."*

DH... *"What does happen at nights?"*

Arron... *"Bare fights!"* (line 180-183)

It struck me that he may well have meant 'bear fights' to represent the animalistic and dangerous side of people fighting, and how out of control it makes him feel. It may also represent his fear of his own hidden side, and what he could become; or it might be representative of the fears of a young man who has grown up in a violent and unpredictable household. Certainly his interview shared with me the fear and worry he is preoccupied with all of the time. There may also be an element of Arron being frightened of his environment is representative of how frightened he is of his own feelings. His feelings of anger and resentment towards his step-father may be projected out onto the community. He is left with feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.

Other participants also felt it is a threatening world around them, describing dangers in their community. Jas was preoccupied with the fact that the PRU provided a building that kept dangerous people out:

DH... *"Ok. Can you tell me how you would describe your feelings about being in [PRU]?"*

Jas... *"Yeah, I think safe, because the first door is on a latch and that, and the second door you have to have like passes and that. And there's like no-*



*one here, who...that I would be.... I don't know, everyone's just friends with everyone, that's what it's like."* (line 136-142)

His hesitant language and unfinished sentences suggest missing words of being 'afraid of' a person or people, suggesting he is highly vigilant for threats in the community and at home. His account suggests fear of becoming like his father, a man whom he knows was violent in the community.

Ian spoke about the more tangible danger of the use of drinks and drugs, and being part of the surrounding sub-culture:

*Ian... "In year 8 I started getting friendly with the wrong people, and that, so I was like drinking, and smoking a bit of weed. (line 114-117) .....Everyone does some drugs and drinks." (line 293).*

This became an increasing problem for him:

*Ian... "I get paranoid and stuff. (line 286) ..... I got suspended for getting drunk at school, and suspended for smoking weed at school. I got suspended for refusing to take my hoodie off, and then they threw me out for beating up some guy called [name]" (line 122-127).*

and he continues to put himself in potentially dangerous situations:

*Ian... "We go down [name] Meadow. And if you've ever been down to [name]'s Meadow on a Friday or Saturday, there's usually big groups of people sitting and drinking and stuff." (line 335-339).*

Ian appears to have chosen to be part of a culture that may present danger for him. He is trying out different roles, with associated behaviour's, in trying to create a fit between schemas from his upbringing and those of groups of peers. Ian appears to have revelled in the 'rebel' image he created at school, as a way of challenging authority, asserting independence and trying to gain

peer approval. His use of alcohol and drugs and level of physical violence against others can be extreme. He describes these events calmly and rather coldly, and he seems to present with limited emotional reactions to events.

Kaamil was also was preoccupied with danger and feeling unsafe:

DH... *“ So you know when you are bothered by something, or worried about something, if things are tough for you, like something’s going wrong and you’re finding it hard, who would you go to for support?”*

Kaamil... *“[name], my friend here.”*

DH... *“ So you would tell [name], about it?”*

Kaamil... *“ Only if they were going to start a fight.”*

DH... *“ Only if they were going to start a fight?”*

Kaamil... *Yeah...[name] helps me in a fight.” (line 73-84).*

Kaamil’s first response to how he copes when things are tough is to fight. He was permanently excluded from 3 schools for fighting, suggesting that he is constantly watchful and vigilant for possible danger.

#### **4.5 Superordinate Theme 3: Surviving in a Dangerous World.**

The third superordinate theme is ‘Surviving in a Dangerous World’. There were similarities and differences between the four young people’s accounts, perceptions and views about what it was like growing up in the local area, but despite these nuances, all four young people described their perception of the local area being dangerous for them, and having found physically assertive ways of managing that perceived danger. The participants were accepting of the danger around them, as part of their everyday life, and instead their preoccupation was on surviving in that dangerous world, how

they respond, manage, cope, and survive the threats they perceive around them.

There were two subordinate themes within this superordinate theme: 'Criminality' and 'Assertion Through Power and Control', which are about how they have adapted to living in a community and neighbourhood they consider dangerous. The literature earlier highlighted that young people can adapt to adversity, but it may not be in a way that is socially or culturally acceptable. This may include the taking and managing of risky behaviours in a belief it minimises the chance of harm, in a reflection of a lack of positive role models who may provide them with resources to stay safe through more acceptable means, as this extract from Jas shows:

DH... *"Who do you look up to most out of your friends or family?"*

Jas... *"Don't know, no-one really." (line 130-135)* and Kaamil:

DH... *"Ok. Who do you think is the person you are closest to?"*

Kaamil... *"What, like friends?"*

DH... *"Yeah, friends or family?"*

Kaamil... *"Well, in my family...(pause) ...I don't know .... (seemed puzzled)...I don't know"*

DH... *"Ok, what about friends...?"*

Kaamil... *"Don't know." (line 137-142).*

So in the face of lack of social support from positively influential people, it seems that all four young people have adapted in what are considered anti-social ways to the threats they perceive to be around them. This links back to the difficulties they have in constructing identities, and the common shared perception amongst them that there is a lack of alternatives available to them,

and becoming primarily concerned with survival. Jas spoke of strategies for managing when things are hard, saying:

Jas... *"I just don't really take things very seriously, so I don't care sort of thing."* (line 478-479).

When Arron was asked to describe a time when things were good for him:

Arron ... *"No.....no I can't, nothing good, nothing good"* and said no-one can help him when things are tough for him, instead he will *"punch something"* (line 111).

The two subordinate themes 'Criminality' and 'Assertion Through Power and Control' will now be presented.

#### **4.51 Subordinate theme: Criminality**

The participant's shared how they adapted to danger in the community. All four of the young people spoke of involvement with the police and criminal behaviours, at various levels, and with differing levels of emotionality. As mentioned earlier, Ian talks about using illegal drugs and alcohol:

Ian... *".. so I was like drinking, and smoking a bit of weed"* (lines 116-117), and, *"I got suspended for getting drunk at school, and suspended for smoking weed at school."* (lines 122-124), and he tells me how common it is for the recreational use of alcohol and drugs at his age (14 years):

Ian... *"... I get paranoid and stuff. I drink. I mean who doesn't at my age.....Well everyone my age gets a little hammered every now and then at the weekend. Seriously, who doesn't? Everyone does some drugs and drinks."* (lines 287-295). Ian's nonchalant description of using alcohol and drugs at school and in his recreation time suggests he is using them quite regularly; his use of drugs may be in an effort to self-medicate for anxiety and

depression, an escapism from his worries, as well as reflecting his wanting to be part of an 'alternative' sub-culture, striving to find a grouping where he is accepted. He has had police involvement because of drugs and for extreme violence in school and the community. After the interview the staff told me that police were recently called because he was threatening a boy's mother with a knife.

Jas on the other hand talks about criminality in a different vein. His father was due to come out of prison a few days after this interview. He had had two long prison sentences for violent crimes, meaning he was absent for the majority of Jas' life. From Jas' account it seems possible that his mother developed a script about what his father was like, and how Jas was the same. His mother may well have been scared Jas would 'turn out the same' as his father, a fear which Jas seems to share and they both feel may have come to fruition. Jas talks about his life in terms of no hope for the future, he sees himself as incapable and with no choices but to follow the same path as his father. He told me he has a court date, and his father will be out of jail in time to go to the court with him. His involvement with the police is destroying the relationship with his mum:

Jas... *"my mum wants me to go and live with my dad in [name of county]"* (line 38-388) because she, *"can't handle me anymore"* (line 394-395)..... *'cos like I keep getting arrested and that, and the police raided the house and that, and they woke up my little brother and that's when she just got annoyed."* (line 398-401)..... *"I weren't there when they raided it, I was like in the cells. And they didn't like let my mum know I'd been arrested, they just*

*turned up and raided the house, and it was only my mum and my little brother in the house, and it was like five in the morning.”* (line 431-436)

Jas explained what he was arrested for on that occasion:

Jas... *“I got caught riding a stolen moped, which I’d nicked and that, and like stupid stuff like criminal damage and stuff like that”* (line 407-410).

Jas seems to fear that this is the only pathway open to him now.

Arron too describes criminal involvement, and describes being arrested for assault:

Arron... *“... they just go ‘you assault someone, you’re nicked’, basically. Like I got arrested yeah for throwing a stick because someone threw a stone at me”* (line 349-352), and, claims innocence:

Arron... *“the first time I was arrested I didn’t even do anything, you know what I mean, I was there but I didn’t do anything. .... I was in the park, some man duffed, stole something, but I was there I was a witness, but I got arrested for it... Assault or something. I got arrested for it but nothing really happened to me but why should I be the one sitting there arrested for him? ...They instantly think you’ve done something.”* (line 407-422)

Arron has strong feelings and much to say about the police being violent and not keeping him safe, possibly reflecting his feelings his parents don’t keep him safe (as discussed more in ‘Family Relationships’). His adaptation to what is interpreted to be an unhappy unsafe home life is to be out in the ‘dangerous world’ that he lives in, possibly safer than being at home, where there is “no point in being good” (line 404), and provoking attention from the police, as parent substitutes, in low level crimes.

Kaamil is less forthcoming about his involvement with the police, but cites his involvement with the police as an example of when things were hard for him:

DH... *"Can you tell me about a time when things were hard for you?"*

Kaamil ... *"Yeah. (long pause). When I get in trouble with the police."*

DH... *"Mmmm, that sounds hard. How did you cope with being in trouble with the police?"*

Kaamil... *"Alright."*

DH... *"Ok, what about your mum?"*

Kaamil... *"She was obviously mad and that"* (line 165-174)

I felt as though I could not ask Kaamil for any more details, as he was, of all the participants, the one who appeared less keen to talk in depth. However, it is interesting that I asked the question in the past tense (*Can you tell me about a time when things were hard for you?*) and he answered in the present tense (*When I get in trouble with the police*) indicating that it is an on-going occurrence.

With all of the young people, the police and criminal behaviours are a way of life, as is the danger they all see in their community, and very much represents surviving in a dangerous world.

#### **4.52 Subordinate theme: Assertion through power and control**

The subordinate theme 'Assertion through power and control' describes the other way in which the participants have managed in this dangerous world that they inhabit. Shared perceptions of injustice and being treated unfairly figured strongly in the participants' accounts. Their perceptions give rise to intense feelings of anger and aggressive reactions to events.

Three of the four young people have grown up in extremely deprived parts of the local area, and the fourth, Ian, comes from an estate in a more prosperous area of the town. All of the accounts of their experiences that they chose to share with me suggest they may react to stressors more quickly than usual, and are watchful for danger. All four were permanently excluded for fighting. They all spoke at some length about their own use of violence and aggression as a means of reacting to and resolving situations. Fighting and arguing displays their self-affirmation and provides protection against feeling powerless and devalued. For instance, Kaamil told me he had been excluded from three secondary schools for fighting, but as unable or unwilling to go into details:

*DH... "Can you tell me about the fighting?"*

*Kaamil... "Don't know" (line 18-20)*

When asked who he would go to when he needed help he told me the name of a friend who was good at fighting. This confirms the hypothesis that Kaamil's primary need is to have a feeling of power and control to meet his primary need of survival, coupled with impulsivity. His first thought was of physical threat and how he would respond. Kaamil has a recent diagnosis of ADHD, which as an inhibition-based disorder means he can be impulsive, with difficulties shifting attention from a perceived threat to a more positive/alternative perspective. He experiences high negative emotions, and lacks social competence. His three exclusions for fighting suggest difficulties with controlling his anger and the tendency to respond in an aggressive way to situations that he perceives as a threat. If Kaamil had always had attention difficulties, with an associated tendency to react impulsively to the situation,



this may then have become his script for himself and others about how he would respond. His initial response is to react quickly to situations he perceives as threatening, through fighting, suggests he may be hyper vigilant to threat. It may be that he is unable to tolerate feelings of stress and anxiety around potentially threatening situations so he acts impulsively in order to ameliorate those immediate feelings at the consequence of longer-term feelings.

On the other hand, Ian's calm and nonchalant approach to talking about his use of aggression suggests he is less impulsive, and can explain and justify his actions, which he considers acceptable. He talked calmly about assaulting a fellow pupil at his previous school, whilst at the same time telling me how understanding he was of the school's decision to exclude him as a result. His language is hesitant at first, possibly wondering if as an adult I might have a different perception of the explanation, but he gained confidence and continued with an open account of the incident:

Ian... *"Ermm....errr... well, ...I shouldn't have beaten him up, but it was, as I explained to the school, it was, ermm, basically what happened was I helped this guy out, basically somebody had locked him in the gym, and I unlocked the gym door and helped him out, and he thought it was me that locked him in, which is fair enough, and he punched me in the face, so ermm...I sort of beat him up and they threw me out, so... all they got was the video, which [name of child] recorded, which was after he threw the first punch, so they didn't see that bit, so all they saw was the video of me beating him up, so.... I had no chance. I had already been suspended for drinking and smoking weed, I was lucky to still be in the school to be honest, so....(shrugs)" (line*

129-147). However, Ian's experiences and perspectives give an indication of competing schema. To help him assimilate the reality of his aggressive behaviour into his moral frame, he convinced himself that his behaviour can be rationalised.

The interview with Ian gives many examples of his trying to control his environment, often through dominance. This may reflect anxieties about his feelings of not fitting in, and his attempt to make his environment more predictable. He spoke of recent changes in his friendships with others, and he seemed relieved that at last he had found some friends. He described not eating while one of them was on holiday, because he missed him so much. Ian's self-concept is linked strongly to his relationships with his family and peers. As his crowd of friends has changed so it appears that his sense of who he is may be beginning to change. Ian's ruminating when his friend was away is significant because of his previous tendency to be pushed away by peer groups, but also because rumination is often linked to anxiety and depression, and is considered unhelpful because it is a passive response rather than active problem solving. This rumination might be related to Ian's increase in anger and aggressive reactions to events as constantly rethinking the same negative events.

Arron, who is so afraid of the world around him, perceives aggression around him as normal. He displays little behaviour inhibition, as persistent fearful emotions become predictable and constant. He therefore cannot rationalise that others may see him as a bully:

Arron ... *"Me and this kid always used to have fights, and he said come with me and I'll verify that you won, and then he told the teacher that I bullied him,*

*when I didn't do anything. And I have witnesses that I didn't do anything to him" .... "They still kicked me out though". (line 14-21)*

He seemed genuinely puzzled at others seeing him so differently from how he viewed himself. If Arron was regularly unprotected at home, with the previous subtheme relating how he viewed his stepfather as a PSO, his being on the receiving end of violence at home results in him seeing it as 'the norm'. To assimilate the reality of his aggressive behaviour into his belief system of the world being threatening and dangerous towards him, he convinced himself that he was the aggrieved party, with the language '*kicked me out*' as a physical description of violence against him.

This use of fighting to manage and express emotions is through fighting was also present in Jas' narrative.

Jas explained what led to his permanent exclusion from school:

Jas... *"I smashed up a classroom."* (line 10), suggesting externalising of anger, which he related to embarrassment over his literacy difficulties:

Jas... *"I used to get angry and that"* (line 349). He felt unable to trust anyone enough to share his difficulty with literacy, and described at length not wanting his peers to find out, suggesting feelings of vulnerability. For Jas, feeling disrespected by his peers triggered his violence; he needed to prove himself and save face. This reflects his schema about what it means to be weak or hold power. His impulsive aggressive behaviour fits into a framework of an automatic schema activated when he feels hurt or disrespected and results in aggression. His father is the ultimate pinnacle of asserting oneself using power and control; as a well-known local gangster figure who has been convicted twice for the use of extreme violence towards

others, his influence was remote as he was in prison for most of Jas' life, but which continued through the expectations and scripts that others had for Jas.

#### **4.6 Superordinate Theme 4: External Influences**

The participants related experiences and perceptions as influenced by their community, and other external influences. This superordinate theme is divided into three subordinate themes: 'Community Influences', 'Family Relationships', and 'School and Learning'.

##### **4.61 Subordinate theme: Community Influence**

The rejection by school, their biggest group and social influence, and the associated loss of identification and belonging, has resulted in all the participants experiencing dichotomous feelings of wanting to belong and being rejected. The projection of these unbearable feelings onto their local community results in the rejection of the usual social norms and support factors for resilience. Each of the young people described the influence of their local community.

DH... *"Do you think [name of town] is a good place to grow up in?"*

Arron... *"No."*

DH... *"What's not good about it?"*

Arron... *"It's shit, like they all tell us not to litter but we see old people do it, people don't care about where they live round here."*

Jas spoke about the local area with mixed feelings:

DH... *"Do you think it is something specific to [this area] that makes some young people hang out and then get into trouble?"*

Jas... *"Yeah, think so, cos it's nasty here in some places."* (lines 481-485).....*"Cos some areas are known to be rough and that."* (lines 144-149).

Arron's major external discourses are right wing views of racism and discrimination, which he describes as being influential in the local community:

Arron ... *"England yeah, was made for English people yeah? When now there's hardly any English people here, it's more like Polish, Indian and that, but you've got like half it's still not good, like if you live in an area, and like you're an English man, and you're in a Polish neighbourhood, you're just gonna get bullied, like all the time. Like in my area, most of them are like Caribbean or English or English Caribbean, well they get on with English people, so it's all good. Asians, they come here, and like they get bullied because they don't like us basically. English people, like Caribbean people, they're clean, in a way if you know what I mean, and like before, I went to one of my friends' houses, Asian, and his house was just dirty and really nasty and smelled nasty as well, and like the same thing, America, like American people, and English people are like let them come in from America. So they might have guns, they're going to bring guns here... And the English people, the public, are going to be the people basically in-between them...."* (line 227-258).

He continued *"....and then there's too many homeless people, English homeless people, for instance, this kid I know, his dad went to get a job yeah, in a school, as a janitor, and he had all GCSEs and everything this man, the prime minister, er the president, whatever it's called...the Principle, the Polish man, he had like one thing, one GCSE like and the English man got like 10, and the English man got denied and the Polish man got to go through. For no reason at all, and then like, I don't like, we're giving people so much stuff, like*

*all over the country, so much stuff, and we're not really giving anything to your own people..."* (line 283-298).

This external discourse feeds into his views of life being unfair, and no-one is there to help him, instead, everything is against him. His views of the community are negative and bigoted, and, one might surmise, learnt from home, and therefore he is unable to view the community as a resource for resiliency. Interestingly, Arron frequently spoke in an accent for much of his interview, suggesting safety in gangster type street culture. Arron also views his family as dangerous and when added to these views his family have narrowed his options for where he can get his support from, and supports his view of life as *"all crap"* (line 122).

Kaamil does, however, appear to use his community as a resource for resilience. He was very clear that he gets by when things are tough because he knows everybody in his community; although the reason his knowing everybody in the community adds to his resilience is because it helps keep him safe:

*DH... "Do you think you will stay living in this area?"*

*Kaamil... "Yeah!"*

*DH... "Is [name of town] a good place to grow up in?"*

*Kaamil... "Yeah, people think it's not, but I like it."*

*DH... "What do you like about it?"*

*Kaamil... "You know everyone and that, and you all stick together and that, so...."* (line 122-129).

*DH... "Tell me what it is about you as a person that helps you get by when things are tough?"*

Kaamil... *"I know everybody."* (line 175-178)

Kaamil views safety as a primary concern, and as the quote above shows, he believes that it is who you know that keeps you safe. It was important for Kaamil to be recognised in his community, in order to be safe. This therefore suggests that he does not feel physically safe unless he is surrounded by people who will help him in fights. He told me he relied on his friend to help him in fights, but otherwise he didn't look to anybody to help him, which I found unexpected as he has a twin brother.

Ian described the use of drugs in the town, and areas where he would go to be with others with an interest in drugs and alcohol. Ian was preoccupied with friendships groups in the community, and has experienced a group of friends who were not a factor of resilience, and seemingly now, he has started mixing with a new group of friends who appear to be a factor of resilience, as he is now wanting to achieve a successful reintegration into mainstream secondary school:

Ian... *"Yeah. I hang around with a different crowd of friends than I did 6, 7 months ago, the bad influence, they're like nicer people now, yeah, I tell them everything."*

DH... *"Where did you meet this group of friends?"*

Ian... *"The bad crowd or the decent crowd?"*

DH... *"The decent crowd."*

Ian... *"The decent crowd, ermm, the majority of them [school 1], some of them are [school 2] that I met randomly at a party"* (line 195-205), and:

DH... *"What's been the happiest time in your life?"*

Ian... *(Pause. Sounds sad)* “I don’t think there really has been. Probably the past few weeks, because I’ve made quite a few new friends, like I mentioned [name 1] and [name 2], I’ve been their friend only for the past 3 or 4 weeks. And we get on so well it’s insane” (line 328-336), and, “When my best friend, he was like my only friend, he went on holiday for about 2 weeks, and I had no-one to look to, and I probably stayed locked in my room for about 2 weeks. It was pretty dull, because no-one to talk to, just music, tv, not going down to eat food, just stayed locked in my room” (line 313-317).

This demonstrates the dynamic nature of factors of resilience.

#### **4.62 Subordinate theme: Family Relationships**

Relationships within families can be very influential in the development of resilience. Resilience can be gained through the family being a resilient family i.e. coping with and making meaning of adversity and stress, affirming strengths and relationships, and having a faith. Additionally, the family can be a factor of resilience through individual relationships and the development of positive inner working models of relationships. Warm nurturing relationships and attachment are central to children’s learning and relationships. However, the participants’ transcripts suggest family relationships can also be a risk factor towards the development of resilience. This can be seen in the following example of Arron.

Arron has a brother with a learning disability who attends a special school. His relationship with his mother and step-father does not appear to offer the consistent emotional awareness, guidance and direction that he needs. They appear to be a ‘disabled’ family, with no shared schema or validation of shared personal experiences. It sounds as though Arron’s role within the



family (as the oldest son, brother, and supporting his mother) has been 'disabled', and the strength of his feelings about possibly 'losing' his relationship with his mother, is clear when he is talking about the murder of Jamie Bulger, and says:

Arron... *"The kid died. He didn't do nothing wrong, and he lost his mum, why you gonna do that?"* (line 227-228). It is interesting that the worst thing for Arron about the little boy's death is that he lost his mum, reflecting Arron's own feeling of a lost relationship with his mother. Arron appears scared of his dominating step-father, and his emotional development appears to have stopped at the age that the step-father became dominant, when his mother was unable or unwilling to protect him. He speaks about not getting on with his step-father, which worries his mum. It is never clear how the step-father tries to act *"like a dad"* (p4; 92) but it is clear that Arron doesn't like it, and it is possibly an abusive relationship. His ability to regulate emotions may have been impaired as a result of being exposed to this trauma over a length of time, leading to him interpreting situations as threats. Arron has perceived through his experiences that his survival is threatened, so he has responded through creating a fantasy world that is full of danger and which reflects his fear and bewilderment. This allows him to attend to his survival needs through power and violence, learnt from those around him. Hence, Arron feels the world around him is dangerous because of feeling under threat at home as well as in the community; he feels no-one can protect him from the dangerous world in which he lives and that he feels let down by those people who should protect him and are not. This would include his family and the police as representatives of his family – powerful autonomous figures. When

he talks about the PSOs not being 'real police' this may well be reflecting his stepfather not being his real father.

Jas appears to have had some positive relationships with caregivers, as well as some more recent disintegration of those relationships. He describes his 'toughest time' when his granddad and uncle died, when he took care of his little brother:

Jas... *"My uncle died in December, and my granddad died just at the start of this year" ..... "when I found out he had cancer and that, I went to visit him in hospital, and he was all skinny and that, and he didn't look like himself yeah? I don't know, I just like cried. But I had to like support my mum cos it was her brother, and that, and I had to look after my little brother and stuff."* (lines 253-259).

Jas is also close to his younger brother, and remembers the happiest time of his life:

Jas... *"Probably when my little brother was born."* (lines 277-278)). He spoke about taking care of his little brother, getting him dinner and putting him to bed (lines 238-242). He talks with warmth about his mum:

Jas... *"I live in [name], like, in a little close, but like, that's like where my mum wanted me to grow up, cos like there's loads of kids that live on that road and that, and when I was little you could just go out and play and stuff, cos like there was a little park like right opposite the house."* (line 152-158)

However, his mum recently told Jas that he has to go and live with his father in another part of the country, because of his involvement with the police. As Jas sounds like he may be a carer for his little brother at times, this is also a concern for the impact on his brother. The additional rejection by his mother

means he loses her and his little brother, two more attachment figures that he will grieve for. The rejection may cause Jas to become increasingly defended. A reflection is that she feels he is like his father who has been in prison for most of Jas's life, which probably reinforces his own fears of becoming like his father. This father figure, although absent for the majority of Jas' life, seems to be a powerful omni-present aggressive figure, who has probably been alluded to in Jas' presence as a well-known local violent criminal.

Ian is experiencing a dichotomy: he wants to see himself as different from his family but identifies with them at the same time. He is the only participant that speaks in terms of his family being 'really nice'; he speaks of wanting to be different from them but equally wanting things to return to how they used to be, and idealising the role he used to have and which his brother now holds. The family have been offered 'Multi-Systemic Therapy', which they have engaged with. It appears that Ian's family have been successful in beginning to create shared meaning, in terms of values, direction and behaviour, as the future-self that Ian describes is congruent with the family's schema ("a house", "money in the bank").

Kaamil was again the one who spoke least freely. He told me he lived with his mum, twin brother, and older brother, and his dad was *"always round and that"* (line 92); yet he seems isolated in his family:

DH... *"Tell me what it's like having 2 older brothers."*

Kaamil... *"It's alright."*

DH... *"Do you ask their advice about stuff?"*

Kaamil... *"No."*

DH... *"Do you go to them if something is troubling you?"*

Kaamil... “No.”

Kaamil seems defended against processing emotions and feelings, and may have difficulty in processing social information. This may lead to anxieties, which he internalises and which results in him being watchful and impulsive in his use of aggression. He says he does not seek out his brothers or other family members if ‘something is troubling’ him, although he told us earlier that he would seek out a friend who would help him in a fight. It may be that Kaamil’s family has a culture of not processing or talking about emotions.

#### **4.63 Subordinate theme: School and Learning**

The participants spoke of the importance of the PRU being due to the positive relationships, small classes, and being physically safe. All participants valued the relationships in the PRU as being based on respect as shown in the following quote from Kaamil, who was excluded from three secondary schools for fighting, and had particularly strong feelings about the importance of relationships with teachers:

Kaamil... “ *And the teachers don’t act all on top of the world and that, and don’t think they’re rich and all that crap, they just act like we are.....I don’t know, they’re just the best. [name of PRU staff member], yeah, it’s just how he is, yeah. Yeah, he gives you a lot of respect. And he’s really friendly to you and that*” (line 30-50).

Given the difficulties that the participants described in finding positive relationships in their families and communities, it is significant that the participants are able to both notice and respond to the strengths based relationship building that is prioritised in the PRU. This can be seen in the significance of respecting the class teachers for Kaamil, as his lack of any

descriptions of relationships other than to protect him in a fight suggests that he has never developed a warm relationship with anyone. The 'respect' that he talks of signifies an adult recognising his worth, leading to self-affirmation, and may in time allow him to move away from his defended position of having to fight in order to affirm who he is. This beginning of a trusting relationship with significant adults is of great importance to Kaamil in changing his inner working models of relationships with adults in schools.

Like Kaamil, Ian also sees the teacher-pupil relationship as being based on power, evoking feelings of being unfair and going against shared principles of value and behaviour. This perceived injustice leads to aggressive responses by each of the participants:

Ian... *"Well, I know I don't like, you know, submitting to authority. It's a little bit of an issue, yeah..."* .... *"Yeah, like, you really don't want to be told what to do. That's what secondary schools do, all the time, is the teachers boss you around and make you submit. You can't be different at all, you have to conform."* (line 93-102)

Jas was permanently excluded from school for *"smashing up the classroom"* (line 10) which he explained happened because:

Jas... *"Erm...the teacher took my bag".* (line 15)

Although he does not expand on this, it is not hard to imagine that he perceived it as a direct challenge. His self-esteem is brittle, but he also views himself as having an image that he cannot bear to have challenged. Like Kaamil, he is unable to regulate emotions other than through attack, through fighting. Jas talked about the embarrassment caused by his dyslexia and how he became angry and chose not to go to class rather than have his peers laugh

at him or ask why he had support. This reflects a low trust in others ability to contain his feelings of anxiety provoked by difficulties with academic learning, and is probably representative of his more general feelings of lack of containment of emotions by a significant adult in his life.

Jas... *"Yeah, in [name of school] and that, when I first went into year 7 I couldn't read and write, and I started being naughty cos I didn't want to tell anyone, (line 322-325). and "I just...that's why I was on my last warning, cos I just refused to do the work." (line 32-33) "Because it was embarrassing." (line 305).*

Jas couldn't bear the thought of being thought of stupid, and this feeling of impotence gives way to rage and anger, without an emotional container to help him manage and tolerate his feelings.

The importance of a trusting relationship with adults is echoed in the following quote by Jas, when asked about whether he found having a TA helpful:

Jas... *"Well, some people don't mind it, but when I used to have it in [name of school], I didn't used to like it cos everyone used to like sit and laugh and wonder why I used to have the person sat next to me and that, and then I used to get angry and that" (line 309-313).*

Jas said he preferred being at the PRU because of relationships:

Jas... *"It's smaller, there's less people." ..... "Get more help and that. And you know everyone." (lines 22-25), and "Just like smaller classes and that, you get like extra help and stuff." (lines 103-104).* Given his earlier comments about feeling safe in the PRU because of the locks on the doors to stop people coming in, it suggests that he is watchful and vigilant at all times against attack.

He feels let down by schools, and was quick in giving a response to how it could have been better for him:

DH... *"Yeah. So from what you say the difficulties you had with reading and writing were one of the main reasons you got angry and were naughty?"*

Jas... *"Yeah."*

DH... *"Is there anyway the school could have helped you better?"*

Jas... *"Yeah, so do that thing where they take you out of languages instead of learning another language like Latin, like practise the language they are struggling with. You could have all your lessons in that small group so you are all the same, and you can practice your reading and spelling all the time, like, in each subject you do there"* (line 321-327).

Sadly, Jas's permanent exclusion, along with his criminal involvement, has meant his mum now wants him to live with his father in another part of the country, meaning he will leave the PRU where he feels safe and where he feels he can learn.

Arron also described fighting in school, being rude to teachers and walking out of class. His resilience is so low, and he, as the other participants, is watchful and on high alert the whole time, and it is likely that he found being in a busy noisy classroom unsafe. It is recognised children can demonstrate educational resilience, but Arron appears too overwhelmed for school to be a positive factor in his life. Much of school seems incomprehensible to him. He cannot value school as a positive resource because he does not see value in anything:

Arron... *"Being rude to teachers, walking out of classes and stuff like that."*

DH... *"Ok, so you have been here a couple of months, what has it been like for you?"*

Arron... *"It's alright. But it's still school."*

DH... *"It is still school. Would you rather just not be at school?"*

Arron... *"Yeah,"* (lines 22-33)

Ian goes to year 10 classes and says he finds the work easy. He is currently in a staged reintegration to a mainstream secondary school, although he keeps 'failing the trials'. Some of what Ian says may suggest he is on the autistic spectrum. He struggles with friendships, is rather polar in his views, and is seen as having difficulty with authority but may well be displaying rigidity of thoughts and difficulty with theory of mind and accepting others points of view. Ian appears to find the social side of school hard, and from his interview it appears that he has suffered periods of depression linked to difficulties in not fitting in with his peer groups and possibly not understanding social interactions very well. He described fights in detail and with little remorse, but has an understanding of what he needs to improve if he is going to manage his move to mainstream school:

Ian... *"... working more with my key worker [name], and working a bit more with [name] (PRU counsellor) to get my anger under control, and to finally get over that barrier of authority, and for school to put a system into place so if I'm getting too angry or something I can just put down a card; 'cos they did that last time, and to be honest it was brilliant, I could just put down a card and just leave without telling the teacher, and just walking out."* (line 363-374)

He has recently made friends and is happier. Ian is very keen to return to mainstream school, which is representative of a movement towards a more



integrated schema. His dichotomy of who he wants to be, and his struggle with identity construction is reflected in his need for friendships for helping him identify with who he is, to help his self-concept and resilience.

The next chapter will further discuss these aspects of these themes in relation to existing literature to extend our understanding.

#### **4.7 Researcher reflexivity in data gathering and analysis**

My psychologist training and clinical experience helped to prepare me for the interviews. I used a therapeutic style in the interview, using empathy, active listening and a friendly relaxed approach, and was aware of when I needed to bracket my emotional responses to their stories, to try and put these to one side, striving to be participant led. The young people were incredibly cooperative with the process, and honest in their stories, and I felt privileged to have gained such an incredible insight into their life experiences.

## **Chapter 5      Discussion**

### **5.1 Overview**

In this chapter aspects from the analysis are presented in relation to existing literature and theory, and discussed with a view to developing a deeper analysis and richer understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the four participants about locally available resources that could bolster resilience.

The chapter then goes on to critically evaluate the methodological approach used, and implications for Educational Psychologists are presented, with particular reference to the aims of the research. The chapter ends with a final reflexive commentary.

### **5.2 The Findings and Existing Research**

In Chapter 4 the analytical narrative described the complexity of the experiences and perceptions of four young people in the PRU about local resources that could be used for increasing resilience. The interpretative and analytic process of IPA allowed the exploration of these experiences and perceptions, and formed four superordinate themes and eight subordinate themes. This analysis suggests that the local ecological factors associated with resilience are also the very factors that can also be the highest risk to some of the participants' resilience. It points to the powerful debilitating impact that some of the local ecological factors had on the participants' sense of self and ability to feel safe, resulting in a subsequent projection of aggression and hostility towards others in their community, with participants describing how the ensuing feelings of negative self-image coupled with heightened vigilance, result in their directing negative affect towards others.

Some of the findings are now explored in relation to existing research. These elements have been chosen as they are of particular interest to the researcher and are noteworthy when considering the research question, *‘What are the experiences and views of four young people at a Pupil Referral Unit in relation to locally available ecological factors of resilience?’*

### **5.21 Superordinate Theme 1: Transition of Self**

The analysis suggested that in addition to the transition of self as a process of adolescence and as a result of being in a PRU, permanent exclusion reflected and exacerbated feelings of exclusion from a ‘mainstream’ social group and from wider society. The result is a strong identification with the PRU and projection of the unbearable feelings of being attacked onto their local community, resulting in the rejection of the usual social support systems provided there.

#### **5.211 Subordinate theme: Identity Construction**

The theme of identity often emerges as a central concern in IPA literature despite the topic under exploration (Smith et al., 2009), possibly because IPA tends to address topics that impact on participants’ lives. When considering ecological factors of resilience with the participants, it was clear that identity construction was an issue for all of them. There are three theoretical models that are useful in extending our understanding of identity construction for the participants, which will now be considered.

Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development proposes that identity formation is the central developmental task of adolescence. Erikson (Kroger, 2007) proposed that identity is a subjective sense of wholeness, brought about through integration of personal values, interests and skills together with

cultural demands, into a coherent identity. He felt that a cohesive identity is brought about through a process of identity crisis, by the psyche experimenting with a range of identifications through imitating those around them, and marks a critical turning point for the adolescent. Jas is trying to avoid the identification with his father, although both he and Ian in particular, have experimented with groups, images and conflicting schemas in their searches for identity. Ian seems to be settling on a more cohesive identity, although this is fragile and highly dependent on identifying with new friendships, while Jas is avoiding commitment to identification.

Erikson stressed that the adolescent has to feel continuity between how he sees himself and how he perceives others see him, and disruptions in this process can result in emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is seen in all of the participants, but most dramatically in Arron, who cannot bear that others see him as a bully, because it represents a part of himself that he projects out onto others. Having been subjected to a domineering stepfather, he experiences dissonance between using behaviours he himself has been subjected to, and yet which he has experienced as powerful and successful in achieving dominance. It is also useful in thinking about Jas, who had a sense of who he was and what he wanted from life, but dyslexia and difficulties in school resulted in him experiencing a loss of self-identity; he is now struggling with identification with his father and his peer group who are also frequently in trouble with the police. Those who fail to reach a secure identity will continue to suffer identity confusion, leading to difficulty with relationships and understanding their role in life.

Erikson highlighted the importance of the role of the community in recognising and being recognised by the adolescent. The participants have been excluded from mainstream school and thereby from mainstream peers and society. They have become defended against this now 'external' community, and begun identifying with adults and peers in the PRU. All four of the participants have split off and projected parts of themselves onto the community around them, in an effort to protect themselves from unbearable parts of themselves.

Erikson's theory suggests that identity construction is dependent on the mastery of earlier critical stages in object relations (Sokol, 2009). Identity construction depends on the individual's ability to integrate the regressive pulls of infantile relational drives and early ego drives into a larger number of attachments, and the ability to identify with a grouping beyond the family (Sokol, 2009; Kroger, 2007). The theoretical construct of mental representation explains how children transform and internalise early interactions with primary caregivers into schemas of self and others. Early identification formation begins with the reciprocal relationship between the infant and the mother, who differentiates her response to the infant depending on its needs. This sensitive relationship gives the infant a sense of interactions and separations. Gradually the infant begins to explore and move away from the mother, and develops concepts of the self, others and future. These schemas both derive from and determine the experience of the self in the interpersonal world and are subsequently used to regulate and direct behaviour. They develop over the life cycle through conscious, unconscious and experiential processes, and can represent early object relations,

consensual reality, or pathological distortions that suggest psychopathology (Haaken, 2012). These cognitive-affective schemas become the template against which thoughts and feelings of self and others are measured and interpreted (Besser & Blatt, 2007). Arron's schemas of parental figures, both as internal and external representations, are threatening and dangerous. He appears to view himself as a much younger child, possibly having never felt safe enough to explore and develop, through inconsistencies in his internal object and emotional containment as an infant. This has resulted in a consequential lack of trust and fear of the world around him.

In addition to the developmental adolescent task described by Erikson, group processes are also useful in analysis of the participants' views. Early teenagers tend to begin the journey to independence from their family through alliances and identification with other groups, within which they can safely experiment with projecting aspects of themselves onto the group in the process of constructing their identity (Youell & Canham, 2006). This helps in thinking about Ian, who describes difficulty fitting in, feeling lonely and experimenting with different grouping, both 'good' and 'bad'. He appears to rebel against all that he considers to be 'acceptable' in behaviour and society, suggesting that he is projecting those parts of himself that he deems undesirable onto groups with which he then identifies. However, there appears to be a recent shift back towards wanting a more acceptable life style and a desire return to mainstream, finding new friends, and wanting a more conventional life style. This suggests he may have resolved the dichotomy of splitting off part of himself in this way, and may be either

developing more secure object relations, or be able to relate better to the parts of his internal object that are secure.

Canham (2002) said there are certain conditions that test the relationship of individuals to their internal objects and the representations of these internal figures in society, in particular, anxiety and the consequences of deprivation. Anxiety is often experienced as a threat and the need to identify someone to blame for this feeling can be extremely powerful (Haaken, 2012). This is relevant to understanding the perceptions and experiences of all four participants in the research, as all have been permanently excluded for fighting. Ian is overtly anxious, and whilst analysis of his transcript suggests he has internalised objects and shared family schemas, he distances and pathologises himself for being different from his internal representations. Arron is scared and anxious of the world around him, and has projected a lot of his unwanted parts of himself onto his stepfather and the world around him.

Early object relations are also important in thinking about transitional experiences between schools and the PRU. Klein (Haaken, 2012) referred to a psychoanalytic focus on the importance of beginnings and endings that reflect early infantile experiences of separation and change. All four of the participants have transitioned into the PRU; all have experienced significant loss and trauma with impact on identity construction (Bonanno, 2008). Firstly, permanent exclusion creates a loss, and for Kaamil and Ian this rejection and loss has occurred multiple times. In addition, Jas has a huge sense of loss of identity, through losing his established sense of self but also through rejection by his mother and the re-emergence of his father into his life, resulting in a loss of other options of identity. Kaamil, Jas and Arron come from separated

families, and for both Jas and Arron, they are experiencing a complete 'loss' of their family units.

Another theory on adolescent development is that one of the most important challenges is the re-negotiation of their position within the family and the maintenance of a warm and supportive relationship with parents (Bonanno, 2008; Waddell & Tavistock, 2005) as necessary to aid the consolidation of their identity formation. However, all the participants appear to have very difficult relationships with their parents, both historically and at the time of separation from their family, and therefore do not appear to have been able to have the consolidation needed. The participants live in areas of high deprivation, in acute contrast to surrounding areas of wealth. It appears that they have not had internal objects that were available to help them through transitions, to manage loss or to internalise strategies for coping. As such, their identities are forged out of experiences that are adverse to basic and fundamental human development. Arron appears to have forged an identity out of hopelessness and chaos, where he sees his very survival as linked to a constant state of fear, violence and abandonment. In order to contain his anxieties and unwanted feelings associated with this trauma, he holds onto an image of himself as a much younger child, who can therefore feel justified in being scared of the world around him. Kaamil appears completely defended which suggests possible trauma, as he will not allow himself to acknowledge any feelings of weakness or vulnerability. He has been excluded from three secondary schools, and he told me once the tape was turned off that his family 'sort out' arguments through physical violence.



## 5.22 Superordinate Theme 2: Feeling Unsafe

The Superordinate Theme 'Feeling Unsafe' was generated through the participants all describing how unsafe they perceived their lives to be, and that they were living in a dangerous world, with violence and gangs in their local communities. At times this reality for them became inseparable from violent fantasies, and demonstrated the vulnerable mental health of one participant (Arron). The young people described experiences and perceptions of the local area being characterised by unsafe behaviours, economic impoverishment, and depleted social resources.

Psychoanalytic thinking about object relations and a safe base enables further understanding of this theme. A child that has a secure upbringing, with secure attachments, will view the world as a safe place to explore, so long as his safe base is there to return to. Arron's narrative suggests that he may have experienced a lack of containment or well managed separations that would have provided him with a good internal object, and a secure and flexible inner world (Bretherton, 1992). The result is that he is largely unable to explore the world around him. He perceives it to be dangerous and unpredictable, and expressed his perception that no-one is there to protect him, not the police or his parents, and '*no-one knows what happens*' (p7; line 180), and he has to defend himself against it. An interpretation is that he does not want to grow up into this dangerous world and his development appears to have stopped at the level of a much younger child.

The internal world of Arron, as the other three participants, means that their perception of external reality means they cannot make use of thoughtful concerned adults. All of them expressed knowledge and experience of

fighting, violence and gangs, and all of them have been involved in incredibly violent acts. All of them were excluded from school for fighting. Canham (2002) describes what drives children to join gangs or to be bullies: “the dominant and destructive parts of the self take hostage what they feel to be other parts which would expose them to feelings of neediness, littleness and ignorance and they do so by imposing a reign of terror on those other parts” (Canham, 2002, p115). Canham also describes how the parent in the internal world is unkind and narcissist, with no vulnerability. This allows the young person to conduct themselves in this violent manner while matching their internalised object. For instance, Arron was puzzled that he was seen as a bully, and Ian wanted to seem reasonable in explaining that he could understand how his violence may be seen as bullying. Both Kaamil and Jas have been excluded for fighting, and Kaamil’s family regularly use aggression and violence to resolve disputes. Jas is scared of the extreme violence his father has used and been imprisoned for. Canham suggests bullies use extreme splitting and projection with the main position in paranoid-schizoid functioning. If after bullying the individual is able to get in touch with the depressive position, and a good internal object, then they will think about their own vulnerability and feel remorse. If this is not possible, then Canham suggests the bully is indeed in a terrifying world, one in which his own hostile projections lodge in objects, which then become toxic and threatening, and fear increases. This mirrors the positions of all the participants, but in particular Arron, who is extremely scared and afraid of the world around him. All four participants view their worlds as unsafe and dangerous, and are

constantly vigilant, projecting unbearable feelings onto people in the community around them.

In considering further the aetiology of our participant's internal worlds, Canham's observation that anxiety and the consequences of emotional deprivation test the relationship the individual has with his internal object and how those internal objects are represented in society is helpful. From his account, Arron may have suffered some trauma from a domineering stepfather. His anxiety, resulting from a threatening household, would have been experienced as a threat and projected onto somebody to blame for the feeling, and this along with a deprivation of introjection of benign and helpful objects, led to Arron adopting a defensive position. If he is to successfully achieve adulthood he must renegotiate his internal and external objects, develop new working models of relationships and build trust in those helpful adults around him.

### **5.23 Superordinate Theme 3: Surviving in a Dangerous World**

The participants described managing in a dangerous world through criminality and assertion of themselves through power and dominance. This theme suggests the participants respond to the dangerous worlds in which they live by becoming involved in criminal sub-cultures and asserting themselves through power and control through violence and gangs. The criminality appears to be part of their social identity, which can be seen as wanting to extend self-representations into the relational field of group life (Wood & Alleyne, 2013), as opposed to a result of psychopathology. This may be seen in Jas:

*"I got caught riding a stolen moped, which I'd nicked and that, and like stupid stuff like criminal damage and stuff like that."* (line 407-410)

and Arron:

*"... they just go 'you assault someone, you're nicked', basically. Like I got arrested yeah for throwing a stick because someone threw a stone at me."*  
(line 349-352)

The sub-theme 'Assertion through power and control' includes the participants describing how they survive in a dangerous world, and the violence of groups and gang fights that they describe to be happening locally. The following quotes from Arron, *'No-one knows what happens'* (line 180), *'there's a gang everywhere'* (line 276) encapsulates the juxtaposition of this violent sub-culture in an affluent home county.

Reasons for gangs can include identity development, friendship, pride, excitement, and often involve a criminal element sometimes associated with low socioeconomic environments in addition offer a psychological sense of community and neighbourhood, with support that may not be available at home (Wood & Alleyne, 2013). It is interesting that the four participants all have experience of criminality and gangs, but with different perspectives. Kaamil for instance is fiercely loyal to his 'hood', whilst Arron is scared by the presence of gangs, and describes a shady world where it is unsafe to walk anywhere, *'there's a gang everywhere, more than one'* (line 280), and, *'there are areas where some of us just can't go'* (line 188). Jas's narrative described his struggle to resist the subculture that appears to him to be his only future. Analysis suggests he feels unable to escape identification with this subculture of criminality and gangs by both parents - his father who is just

released from prison for violent hate crimes, and his mother who is 'giving up' on him, reinforcing his fear that this is now a preset path for him. Ian is the participant who has experimented most with identities and groupings of people, and analysis suggests the gangs and subcultures around him excite him.

Erikson's theory of identity and role confusion suggests groupings and gangs offer clear identity, ideology and behaviour roles (Kroger, 2007). Affiliation with groups is most likely between the ages of 12 – 16 years, when adolescents strive to be accepted without conditions (Haaken, 2012; Waddell & Tavistock, 2005). Wood & Alleyne (2013) explore the concept of gangs and groupings replacing family relationships in an attempt to get normal developmental needs met. Furthermore, they suggest that violent gang life reflects attempts to psychologically transform or process the experiences of helplessness and passivity resulting from childhood trauma. They highlight that the defensive operations enabled by violent gang life usually repeat the early trauma, in an attempt at omnipotent denial, vengeance and identity construction.

Gang members are most likely to come from low socio-economic environments, be low academic achievers, not accepted by normative peer groups, and have a poor sense of identity and support from their own family. The participants described violence and gangs as being part of their lives, and this is likely to be extended to the lives of similar young people in the PRU.

Psychoanalytic thinking facilitates an understanding of gang formation (Canham, 2002; Wood & Alleyne, 2013). In their search for identity, and

separation from their family in the pathway to becoming an adult, adolescents project unwanted aspects of themselves into other groups who are ridiculed or attacked. These divisions are often along lines of race, social class, or other groupings/gangs. Splitting predominates, with idealisation and denigration. Freud (Youell & Canham, 2006) postulated that the family group is the prototype experience for all future groupings. When the family lives in a precarious paranoid state in which introjective functions are absent, and splitting and projection dominate, these are sought to be replicated in gangs or behavioural responses.

Canham (2002), in his writing on how therapeutic groups can act as gangs, defines a gang as a group in which destructive forces have taken over. It is in paranoid-schizoid functioning where there is not thinking, but projection of feelings that may expose the individual or group to feelings of ignorance, weakness or neediness. He emphasizes the impact of extreme anxiety and early trauma, and deprivation of containment in early life, which results in the individual being unable to hold onto a depressive position function and be more likely to resort to projection and splitting. He notes that children who have been abused seek to rid themselves of feelings of fear, anger, guilt and shame by passing on these experiences. The projection onto other groups tends to be the most disturbed, psychotic parts that the individual finds the hardest to deal with, and gangs and groupings can behave in narcissistic and aggressive ways that they believe that would be seen as unforgivable in an individual (Wood & Alleyne, 2013).

Literature on neuropsychology is also proving beneficial in giving a greater insight into the themes. Writing on trauma and loss mirrors the theme of

family relationships being crucial in developing resilience (LeCroy, 1988). Brisch (2012) described the importance of unresolved trauma in parents that is re-experienced through parenting their own children, triggering dissociative or trauma-specific behaviours in the parents that promote fear in the child. The participants all described fighting in school, and issues with authority figures. These characteristics may be linked to their looking for threat and challenge continuously, as a result of early stress (Haaken, 2010). The majority of neglect and abuse in childhood, including that associated with domestic violence, is in low-income, highly impoverished environments, with family and community stress and high crime rates, leading to prolonged periods of stress (Sedlak et al, 2010; Haaken, 2010). It is recognised that the structure of the brain changes in children in response to their experiences in their environment, and that allostatic levels are set in early childhood. Trauma and on-going stress can lead to changes in neurobiological processes including physiological responses, arousal, emotional regulation and social information processing, through changes in the interconnected PFC, AMY, limbic system, and the hypothalamus. Physically abused children are hyper-vigilant for threats, and search for and are more likely to detect angry faces; their perceptions of people's actions are biased towards anger, they have difficulty in disengaging from angry faces, take longer to calm down and are quicker to react. Young people who have experienced abuse have higher levels of cortisol during, and in anticipation of, a stressful mental task. Individualised programmes for building resilience may therefore require cognitive restructuring, with active teaching of alternative ways of recognising, labelling and responding to stimuli.

Early emotional trauma resulting from loss and separation has been demonstrated to affect the development of emotional and behavioural difficulties (Brisch, 2012; LeCroy, 1988). The lives of the participants as described were analysed and interpreted as chaotic and unpredictable. For Arron, frightening things happen to him and there is no buffer, and it seems likely the frightening things are often at the hands of his caregivers. The experiences he describes reflect layers of trauma that make it impossible for him to understand or process a single or even multiple events in a developmentally healthy way. His life experiences have affected his perception of himself, others around him, his interactions and the world around him. His capacity to regulate his internal or external experiences and reactions are reduced to those that are primitive survival reactions, with his fear of his caretakers projected into contempt and fear of the police who should also be seen as protective figures not abusive figures. He appears to have grown up in a climate of fear, and this has resulted in his being very watchful and on high alert for danger.

#### **5.24 Superordinate Theme 4: External influences**

The subordinate themes within this superordinate theme will now be examined in relation to literature.

##### **5.241 Subordinate theme: Family Relationships**

Attachment theory enables a richer understanding in this theme. The earliest attachment systems are developed between the infant and the primary caregiver. Young children rely on caregivers to externally modulate through providing comfort and soothing when they are distressed. These experiences are internalised and they develop skills for self-soothing. Children who



experience abusive or unresponsive caretaking may rely on primitive regulation strategies, such as being over controlling or shutting down their emotional responses, as we can see in Kaamil, or through physiological stimulation or inappropriate behaviour possibly representing Ian's adolescent development. Secure attachment figures provide mental representations to maintain a level of integration even when environmental and interpersonal support is unavailable, and therefore help adaptive functioning (Levy et al, 1998). These secure attachments systems provide inner working models for all other relationships, enable the child to cope with and express emotions, and enable healthy development. Attachment systems predict success in school, psychopathology and behaviour problems (Levy et al, 1998, LeCroy, 1988), and equally, experiences of poor caregiving result in negative representational models of attachment figures and the self. It is recognised that secure attachments can prevent psychopathology in later life, whilst insecure attachments have been shown to occur more frequently in abused or neglected children, and disorganised attachments have been closely linked with abuse (Brisch, 2012; LeCroy, 1988).

Youell & Canham (2006) explain how splitting and projection are an essential part of the adolescent's psychic developmental process, as part of the process of separation and individualisation away from the family. The adolescent may therefore experience attachment and separate identification occurring simultaneously but in opposition to each other. Secure attachment can facilitate this process. Object representations become increasingly extended to a range of internal, external and symbolic representations. The development of symbolic representations is achieved in later stages of

separation-individuation in adolescence. Arron appears not to have internal objects to rely on. He is terrified of growing up and has very little internal sense of containing and supportive adults who would help him do so safely. The result is that he projects unwanted feelings onto the world around him, which he perceives as scary and dangerous.

Psychopathology can result from impairments of the schemas of the representational worlds that occur as a result of serious disruption of the relationship between the child and caregiver (Blatt, 2006). While Arron feels let down and at risk from his parents, it is Ian and Jas who express the most dissonance in conflicting schemas. Ian has experimented with groupings and identities, and exhibited extreme violence. Yet the end of the interview he described hope for his future, with new friendship groups and aspirations that reflect his family based schemas. It is hoped he will begin to move away from pathologising himself as having something wrong with him, as his dichotomy lessens. Whilst Jas gives the impression of being uncomfortable with his path as it now appears to be set out, he has a history of aggressive actions in school as responses to being challenged or embarrassed, and criminal activity.

#### ***5.242 Subordinate theme: Community Influences***

All four participants feel unsafe in their community, which in part is a reflection of the very real violence and aggression they have been surrounded by throughout their lives, from violent fathers/step-fathers, local gangs, and as a community and family response to situations. Kaamil, with three permanent exclusions for fighting, has learnt that the fighting and the reputation it gives him in the community keeps him safe; he knows who to

ask for support in a fight, he is recognised locally as being able to fight, and his first response to situations is to fight. He, like the other four participants, feels the community around him is unsafe, rather than being a factor of resilience. Arron graphically described the dangers that he perceives in the community, although at times he appears to struggle to identify what is real and what is fantasy. Ian knows and is excited by the danger in the community, especially the drink and drugs in the parks, and Jas is scared of the community and his role that he is being thrust into. Jas describes the PRU as being a safe physical space because no-one can get in, suggesting that he is watchful and fearful. All four have found ways to manage and survive in this hostile environment.

Arron also spoke of bigoted views of racism and nationalism, and analysis of this thinking reflects the feelings of the participants towards the community as a whole. As discussed earlier, the participants are struggling with identity, and Erikson spoke of nationalistic ideologies being a rigid defence against states of identity confusion (Sokol, 2009; Kroger, 2007). Extending this thinking, Canham (2002) postulates that racism can be seen as a projective process. Thoughts and feelings that the individual does not want are attached to a racial identity, and the race is then hated because of the characteristics attributed to it, and feared because of an unconscious expectation of retaliation of these unwanted attributes. In order to ensure the racist's unwanted feelings and thoughts do not return the hatred of the race is further supported by arguments about the way the race has brought hatred on itself. This is seen in how Arron described local economic deprivation with jobs going to Polish people, and an Asian peer having a dirty house. This

generates his paranoid fear and hatred in an attempt to manage internal anxiety, and is fuelled by envy of the success of the immigrants compared to his perception of himself as a failure.

Canham felt this is particularly seen in communities with poverty where envy of others arises, particularly when the external poverty reflects an internal deprivation. This encapsulates the perceptions and experiences of the four participants, and can be seen to reflect their feelings towards the community as a whole. All four of the participants project unbearable parts of themselves onto the community, reflecting their unconscious fear of the internalised parts of themselves that are aggressive and violent.

#### ***5.243 Critical evaluation of methodology***

The use of IPA provided themes of common experiences and perceptions of the four participants, but the idiographic nature also allowed for individual differences to be recognised. Kaamil was less forthcoming in our interview, but he still had commonalities with the other three participants. For instance, while Kaamil had a clearer sense of his future self, he was excluded from three mainstream secondary schools for fighting, trusted no-one, and was involved in criminal activities.

The phenomenological epistemology of IPA is interested in the phenomena as experienced by the participant, and the analytic process should take account of the context and culture of the participants (Willig, 2008). The process of IPA was therefore appropriate to investigate the lived life experiences and perceptions of the participants in relation to which locally available resources they accessed in striving to be physically and emotionally

well, and resilient. The semi-structured interview questions were broadly based on finding their views and experiences of the locally based resources, as outlined in an ecological model of resilience (Ungar, 2005), while allowing them the freedom to talk and explore areas they are interested in.

The questions asked during an interview are crucial to the replies received (Brocki and Wearden, 2006), as is a relaxed and therapeutic style of interviewing (Wachtel, 1993). The participants were relaxed and spoke freely as a result.

Following the nature of idiographic research, a homogenous group of participants were recruited, all being pupils in Year 9 at the PRU. However, whilst themes were common and helped in analysing the meanings of what the participants shared with me, they are idiographic and results cannot be generalised to a wider group of pupils at the PRU. Smith (2011) highlights that focusing on the particular details of individual's experiences can produce significant aspects of humanity. The strength of research using IPA is in the depth of the analysis and the insight it gives to the phenomena being explored.

The participants were purposely selected from a group of 25 volunteers at the PRU who had previously completed a questionnaire on resilience called the Children and Youth Resilience Measure-28 (CYRM-28). Originally this study had planned to take the quantitative data into account too, but it was unwieldy. It could be argued that a different method of selecting four participants could have been used, but this method did provide a homogenous group.

Whilst IPA is designed to give an 'insider's perspective' of the participant's views and experiences, it also recognises that the analytic process is always a co-constructed one by the researcher and the participant (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006, p.103). Therefore, EP colleagues looked at the transcripts and my analysis to check robustness of my interpretations, but it is recognised that the participants may have engaged differently and given different answers to somebody else. The four young people I interviewed were fantastic, and it was a privilege to work with them. However, despite feeling that they relaxed and talked to me quite freely, there are inevitably issues around power differentials that are hard to avoid. The amount of written material to analyse was huge, but allowed in-depth analysis. In retrospect, I feel that perhaps I should have carried out more than four individual interviews although this may have prevented the depth of analysis being achieved.

I was aware of the role of reflexivity in the research, and strived to be critically self-aware of my own interpretations being based on my own experiences, assumptions and interests that may have influenced the themes in the IPA. Although I kept a brief diary as I went, I feel that I could have addressed this more in my analysis of my research.

### **5.3 Implications and feedback**

I fed back my findings to the PRU through a series of three twilight insets of one hour each. The concept of resilience was explained, including the link to mental health and well-being, and the ecological model of resilience used in this research was described. The superordinate and subordinate themes were described, with examples, in describing the participants' perspectives of

local factors of resilience. In particular, emphasis was given to describing the positive comments of the participants about the PRU, including the feeling of being physically and psychologically safe in the school, the importance of the relationships with the PRU staff, and how these were the main factors of resilience for all participants. It was felt important to respect the anonymity of the participants, whilst emphasising the idiographic nature of the study.

I have presented two resilience measures to the staff, and we are in the process of training staff to use both measures (Resilience Scales and CYRM) with an aim to developing a within-school procedure for keeping resilience central to the work with the pupils. I am developing a series of workshops with staff that will run through the year to support the staff in the development of this work in the PRU. The PRU have initiated a project on compassionate mindfulness as part of a bigger project on developing resilience within the school, and my role will be to support the PRU EPs and the staff in keeping this high on their agenda and being reflective and reflexive in their approach. By gaining a rich picture of some of the experiences of young people we can begin to understand which factors of resilience individuals are accessing, support them in these, and develop additional factors of resilience for them to access. Longer term, the aim is to improve and develop locally available resources and access to those resources to help local young people be resilient.

#### **5.4 Future Research**

1. Continue further research into the views and experiences of young people about locally available resources for resilience.

2. Research into ways of improving young people's access to local resources that bolster resilience.
3. Research into how locally available factors of resilience can be improved.
4. Schools and the LA are requesting research into effectiveness of resilience programmes.

### **5.5 Contributions to educational psychology**

This study emphasises the importance of EPs being involved in real world research in the LA or organisation in which they work, in order to help develop understanding of the experiences and views of young people.

Psychologists are used to working in a consultative manner, as active problem solvers, taking a systemic perspective. This study demonstrates the importance of considering resilience when working with children and young people with SMHD, and suggests that EPs are well placed to develop this work in schools and local authorities. In the same way Government reports have stressed building resilient individuals and resilient communities should be central to all public health developments for improving mental health and well being, so EPs should be considering it central to their work with children and young people with SEMHD. This group has poor outcomes and high incidents of mental health.

The use of an ecological model of resilience, and an interpretative constructivist approach which takes into account the intervening variables in the interactions between the individuals and their environment, an individualised approach can be taken to identifying risk factors and protective factors as seen from the perspective of the young person. Resources can be



identified to develop aspects of resilience with the young person. This insight and understanding can then be used to develop long-term strategies and practices for improving life outcomes for young people.

This study shows how the views of young people are at the heart of improving our understanding to developing appropriate local resources and strategies, and EPs are well positioned to be able to facilitate schools and local authorities in their thinking and understanding of resilience, through developing an understanding of children and young people's views of locally available factors of resilience.

### **5.6 Self-reflection on undertaking the research.**

Working with the PRU and the young people in this study has been a great experience. I feel humbled that the participants shared their experiences and views so openly. It moved me that they were willing to share their stories with an adult that they thought was interested in them, and in hearing their story, and I wondered how often they had had that opportunity before. It gave me hope that they were keen to have a positive interaction with me, and that they felt their experiences were worth talking about and were valued, and confirmed my belief in the importance of listening to children and young people's views.

I have wondered about how the participants are, since the interviews, and look forward to getting updates on their progress.

My learning and awareness of the subject of resilience has strengthened my initial belief that there are ways to improve resiliency and improve outcomes. I feel that resilience is part of the dynamic and fluid side of us all, influenced by all of our experiences and perceptions, always present and developing,

ebbing and flowing. I believe, more than ever, that it is vital to be respectful of others' narratives and perceptions.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated the importance of exploring young people's views and perspectives when considering specific local factors of resilience that are relevant to them. The use of IPA gave a rich account of the individual experiences and views of four young people, helping our understanding of the complexity and contexts of their lives. It addressed the research question, *'What are the experiences and views of four young people at a Pupil Referral Unit in relation to locally available ecological factors of resilience?'* identifying four themes: 'Transition of the Self', 'Feeling Unsafe', 'Surviving in a Dangerous World', and 'External Influences'. The analysis points to the powerful debilitating impact local ecological factors associated with resilience can have on the participants' sense of self and their ability to feel safe and contained, along with their subsequent projection of aggression and hostility towards others in their community. Accounts told of the local community being seen as a threatening and dangerous place, with participants feeling unsafe. Their heightened vigilance as a result of traumatic and violent experiences resulted in efforts to control their environment through power, assertion, and criminal activities. The lack of internalised secure objects has made it hard for the participants to develop an identity or manage their feelings and emotions, and their feelings of negative self-image and unbearable aspects of themselves result in their directing negative affect towards others and onto their communities. Respect for adults in the PRU

was the shared factor of resilience for the participants, along with small class sizes and the physical and psychological safety the building offered them.

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